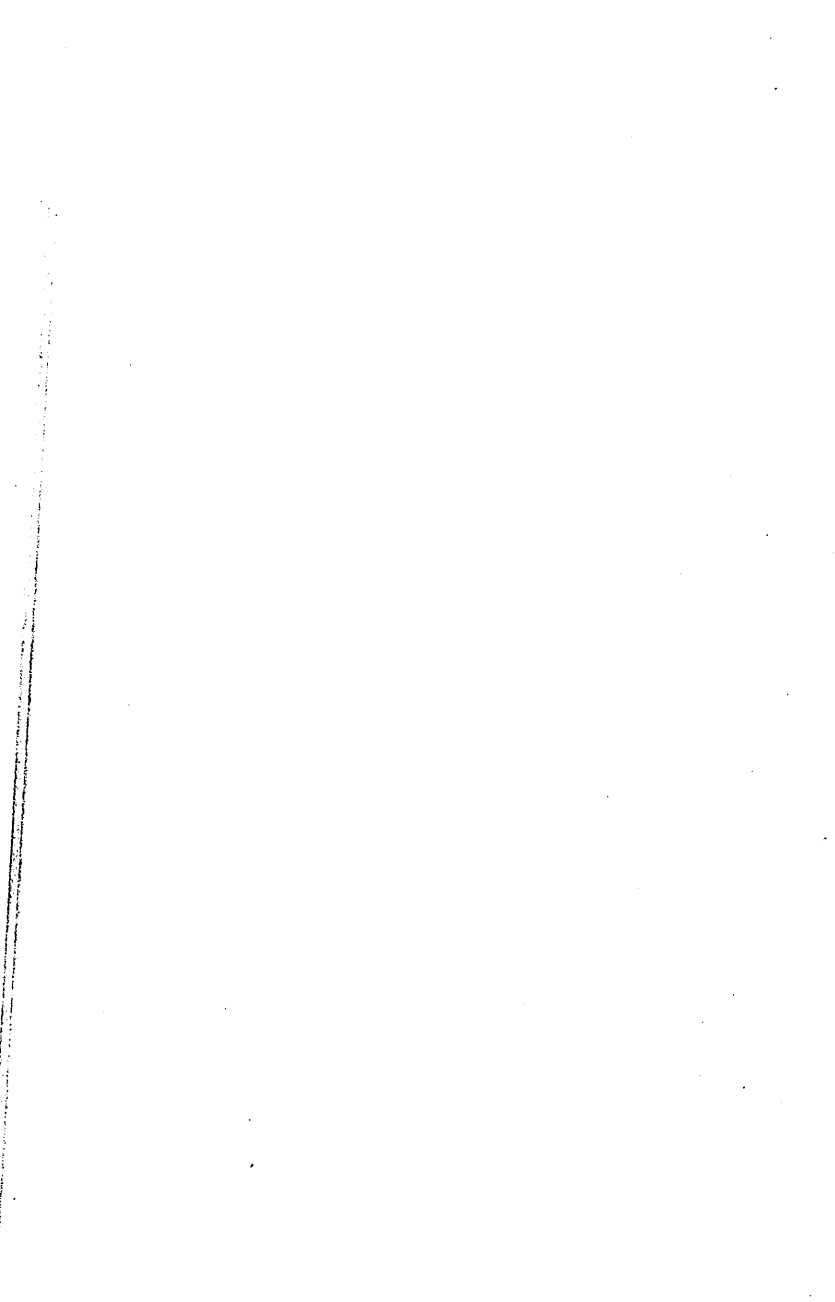


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**THE PROPHET OF RECONSTRUCTION
(EZEKIEL)**



THE PROPHET OF RECONSTRUCTION

(EZEKIEL)

A PATRIOT'S IDEAL
FOR A NEW AGE

BY

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PREFACE

IN the following pages I have attempted to use the materials left by Ezekiel in order to describe the development of his thought. He himself has given us his convictions as he was conscious of them at certain great moments of his life. I have set myself to fill up the intervals. All reconstruction is a perilous business; most of all when reconstruction attempts the inner history of a great man separated from us by centuries.

But if it be true, as I believe it is, that Ezekiel for all his limitations (and who has not to suffer from limitations ?) was one of the most penetrating thinkers of the Hebrew race, we shall learn much by studying him from the dynamic as well as from the static point of view. And this, as I have tried to show, he has made it possible to do with considerable success.

I do not expect to escape the charge that in doing this I have been working at an imaginary portrait. I have deliberately avoided scattering over the pages the exasperating phrases "it may be that," "in all probability," and the like; I can only hope that the reader who takes the trouble to verify the references I have given will be disposed to modify this criticism.

PREFACE

I have assumed what is generally known as the "critical" view of Hebrew history and literature. Some questions still under discussion I have treated as if already decided, notably the date of Deuteronomy and the relation of Ezekiel to the "Holiness Code." In each case the narrative in the text will, if I am not disappointed, commend itself as at least a possible explanation of the facts at our disposal, and a note in the margin will be found to neutralise the appearance of dogmatism.

I have been obliged, by the necessity of economising space, to speak categorically on other points which claim discussion. Where I have been guilty of this, the initials, C.B., after the reference in the margin denote that the discussion, here omitted, will be found in my commentary on Ezekiel in the "Century Bible." In the notes in that little work I have paid homage to the modern scholars, unmentioned in these pages, who have done so much to elucidate this difficult but fascinating author.

Much of what follows was written a year ago. Since then the political situation has changed, and reconstruction appears a more serious task than to some it appeared then; but for the principles of reconstruction we may still look with hope and courage to the profound and comprehensive scheme of Ezekiel.

W. F. LOFTHOUSE.

HANDSWORTH,

March, 1920.

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CHAPTER I

THE PROBLEM OF RECONSTRUCTION

GENERATIONS, like individuals, gain, and sometimes suffer, from self-consciousness. The men and women who form them stand on the brink of the unknown. All the past leads up to a blank wall. Few of us can avoid the feeling that the unknown immediately before us will be something more worthy to merit the attention than what lies behind our backs. We may be like the thinker of "Locksley Hall," or of "Locksley Hall Sixty Years after," but something of the Apocalyptic writers lives in us all. Ours are the days just before the fulfilment of the ages.

At some periods there is more excuse for this attitude than at others. To-day, after five years of devastating war, who can resist the conviction that a new era is upon us? It is almost as inevitable as when in 1815 men talked serenely of an end to all war. We are not serene. We hope for an end to war, and to much beside that has blackened the past. But hope is mixed with dread. If hopes are not to prove cheats, or dupes, hard thinking and hard work will have to be done. Our bruised and scarred civilisation will not rebuild itself. To accomplish that is our task. Other ages have been characterised by transition. The past has slowly changed and dissolved into something different. The men

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and women living in it have watched the process as more or less passive spectators. We cannot afford such passivity. The issues are too great. The danger to our ideals is too pressing. Ours must be an age of reconstruction.

There has never been a time when, by a careful observer, a change could not be seen passing over the spirit of the world. True of the downfall of the Roman Empire in the Fifth Century, the rise of the new conception of European unity under Charlemagne, the period of the invention of gunpowder, the fall of Constantinople, and the discovery of the New World at the close of the Middle Ages, and the desolating sequel of the Wars of Religion in the seventeenth century, it is equally true of the less striking periods which saw the first Crusades, the beginnings of the Industrial Revolution, and the opening of the Great Exhibition of 1850. Every generation is pregnant with possibilities of blessing or disaster. Ideals are always at stake.

But for our own age this much can be said. The stake was never so great, or so widely realised. To shake ourselves free for ever from the tyranny of war, or to be condemned to the prospect of conflicts growing steadily more savage and destructive till civilisation becomes its own murderer; to lift industrial life into a genuine co-operation between direction and labour, capital and brain and muscle, or to watch the world of industry desolated by struggles fiercer than in the fiercest days of the past; to rid the world of ancient forms of poverty and disease and behold "joy in widest commonalty spread," or to acquiesce in still more glaring contrasts of wealth and poverty than we knew when the arts of exploitation were still comparatively young: to

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learn to look upon all life as beautiful and sacred, or to build up a slavery more malignant than the New World or the Barbary Coast have ever endured—these are the issues that face us to-day. Nothing seems too good to be hoped for; nothing too evil to be feared.

It is no wonder then, that Reconstruction is the task to which all parties and sections of thoughtful men are devoting themselves. But the very expression needs examination. What do we desire to reconstruct? The word suggests a broken instrument, or a ruin, whose materials we still possess, while the form is decayed or destroyed. Reconstruction may mean restoration. But there is no question of restoration to-day. We do not wish to return to the old. We wish to escape from it, to cast it behind us for ever. We can never take the frame of things, however unsatisfactory, and shatter it to bits. But in our days events have done this for us. The fabric of society has been flung down. The one thing certain, in these days when the state of war is slowly and painfully passing over into that of peace, is that the old and familiar cannot come back of itself. We have been given the chance of remoulding it nearer to the heart's desire.

Such a time may well suggest, to the more daring thinker, the sketching of Utopias. A few such sketches the world will not allow to perish. Plato's "Republic" in the fourth century, B.C., and in more modern times More's "Utopia" and Bacon's "New Atlantis," were produced in ages of transition. But such ideal constructions have been few. Equally few have been the attempts to put Utopian ideals into practice. The stern Commonwealth building of the Puritans; the ecstatic projects of the

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early stages of the French Revolution ; and perhaps we might add, if we stood further away from it, the desperate attempt in Russia to translate Marxism into an actual political system, are the outstanding and almost the only examples of conscious attempt to build up the old into the shape of the new.

Reconstruction appears to make too large a demand on the energies and faith of mankind. History denies us reconstruction, and presents us with her less exciting sister, reform. Of reform, or reformation, there has never been any lack. But in these days we do not talk of reforms. We are not interested in them. Or, perhaps, we do not believe in them. Is it because they savour of compromise, of the adjustment of the various selfish or party interests into a change that satisfies no one while it is just tolerated by all ? As little do we talk of revolution. We dread it. We want neither the "red fool-fury of the Seine" nor the dark and sinister passion of the Neva. Or else we contemplate it as a purging fire in enemy countries, happily unnecessary in our midst.

It may be, however, worth while to ask what is the difference between these three kinds of change. Change of some kind must come. If we dread one, can we be sure of securing the other ? The difference, indeed, is not easy to state ; the less so because what to one man is reform may be to another reconstruction, and revolution to a third. At what stage did the reforms of Mirabeau pass into the revolutionary measures of Robespierre ? And why did the Reform Act of 1832 fail to reproduce the revolution which so many legislators feared and even saw in its daring sweep ?

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The current terms of political philosophy cannot as yet be reduced to exactness ; and there is no careful distinction of usage on which scientific definitions can rest. But an attempt may be made to distinguish these three expressions by suggesting that reform means a change of emphasis or proportion or degree—a shifting, so to speak, of the centre of gravity. Thus, the Reform Act of 1832 shifted the centre of gravity in the electorate ; the English Reformation did the same thing in the ecclesiastical world by giving to the crown what had before been vested in the Pope, and dragging into prominence certain elements in religious life which had previously scarcely appeared above the surface. A revolution, however, implies far more than this ; it involves a change in governing power. This is equally true of North America in 1775 and of France in 1789. It was not that one governing element lost something of its power and another gained more than it possessed before. Both 1775 and 1789 took the governing power out of the hands that previously had held it, and placed it in others. Russia in 1917 furnished another clear example.

To find a formula for reconstruction is less easy, since examples of reconstruction are less conspicuous. If such an example could be found, it would be seen to involve a change of principles of government rather than of actual governors. Reconstruction has rarely taken place without revolution. A good example, however, might be found in the early Roman empire, when for the old principle of Senatorial Government, that the Provinces were to be exploited for the benefit of the governors sent to administer them, was substituted the definite ideal

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of aiming at the prosperity of the provincials themselves.

Or, to elucidate the distinction, we may regard the state as a building; a reform will simply alter the position of the doors, the size of the gables, the shape and number of the windows, and so on, while the building itself is still intact. A revolution will turn a new architect and contractor on to the building, and let them do their best, or their worst. A reconstruction will use the old materials, but the plans may be different; the defects of the old structure may be entirely avoided and even a new purpose served and achieved.

It is clear that each of these processes may overlap the others. The choice of the name depends on the purpose and point of view rather than on the concrete and visible changes. The new architect may be satisfied with no more than a few changes in the position of gables, and the new materials may even be used to build a house much like the old one which it replaced. What separates reconstruction from reform and revolution is the fact that it thinks more of the needs of the future than of the evils of the past.

The main purpose of the Reformer is to get rid of certain abuses; and the main purpose of the Revolutionary is to bring an old and rotten system of government to an end. To each of these the negative part of his work is more important than the positive. But the agent of reconstruction thinks first of the positive part of his problem. For him, to revert to our metaphor, the building is already pulled down. It is his task to get something more serviceable put in its place. If he decides to retain the old plan, it is because new occasions

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can still employ old methods. If he decides on something entirely different, it will neither be from hatred of the past nor love of change, but because changing needs and convictions demand fresh vehicles and instruments for their fulfilment. New wine cannot be put into old bottles.

We thus arrive at a test for all sound reconstruction. We must first ask, what are the new needs? What is the new spirit which demands its adequate expression? And then, how do the new institutions fit these needs? Is the new organism appropriate to the new function? The recognition of this test is at once the limitation and the salvation of all who attempt the weighty task of reconstruction. They must not set out to build castles in Spain. Neither history nor politics ever furnishes its students with *novæ tabulæ*. No architect has a white piece of paper on which to plan out any style of edifice that strikes his fancy or caprice. When we are dealing with human affairs, we can only neglect environment and history at our peril.

Hitherto we have taken all our examples from the Western world. Most writers regard political philosophy as if it had sprung to birth in Greece, and had never learnt to travel eastwards. There are many reasons for this view; but it is none the less a serious error. The political thought of Europe has lost much from its neglect of one of the best political manuals ever compiled, the Old Testament history of Israel.

The expression sounds strange as a title for the Old Testament; and more strange perhaps to the student than to the general reader. All are aware that the Old Testament contains a number of

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“historical books,” but students know that in those books there is little of history in our modern sense. The historian of Palestine must look elsewhere for some of the most important parts of his account ; to archæology, to épigraphy, and sometimes to his own imagination. How little we know from the Old Testament itself, for instance, of the tariffs or the educational system of the Jews ; of the secrets of Hebrew diplomacy ; of the reasons for the changes of dynasty, or the relations of the court to the nobles and the people. What materials are given us for judging the importance, to the national life, of Ahab or Zerubbabel ? The very things we most desire to know are often hidden behind a contemptuous sentence—“ the rest of the Acts of Omri and all that he did, are they not written in the Chronicles of the Kings of Israel ? ”

None the less, it is possible to read much, between the lines, of the struggling thoughts and aims that made history both in Israel and Judah. They may be “ writ small ” ; but they are there ; the restlessness of an incurably democratic people to whom the family and the tribe were always more than the throne ; the opposition of a nation of agriculturists to foreign ideals of industrial and commercial wealth ; the inability of a government founded on a home-loving peasantry to carry out any scheme of foreign expansion ; and the curious mixture of the passion and the powerlessness to assimilate external ideas and customs which has ended by driving the Jew into all the world and leaving him a stranger and a pilgrim in every land.

But there is more than this in the Old Testament. It is a record and statement of ideals. Those ideals are variously expressed in the different strata

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of the writings in the Old Testament library ; but they are engraved for all time in the monumental words of Micah.¹ The supreme importance for a nation is to know what its God requires ; and these requirements are three : justice, mercy and piety. No other people, and no other writer untouched by Hebrew influence, has ever attempted such a statement. But the truth is found everywhere in the Old Testament. And we can still speak of the Old Testament as a unity, separated though its earliest writings may be from its latest by more than a millennium, because it is bound together by this ring of gold.

These ideals have never been wholly lost sight of. Dimly guessed at in Greece and Italy, they yet gave to the thinkers of Athens their chief value for posterity ; and they enabled the statesmen of Rome to leave the Western world an enduring conception of government and empire. They inspired the noblest utterances of the mediæval Church and the most daring vision of the Protestant reformers—too soon dispelled by the states which naturally held them suspect. They flamed up in the dawn of the French Revolution ; they were the soul of the solid yet daring thought of the nineteenth century liberalism ; and above all the horrors, the sordidness, the sheer cruelty and wastefulness and greed and brutality of the past years of war, they have found a majestic voice with which to recall the world to sanity, to good-will and to hope. No one can mistake the fact that the heart of the world has only been stirred when an Asquith, a Venizelos, or a Wilson fell back upon something of the language of a Hebrew prophet. Even Bolshevism

¹ Micah vi. 8.

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was listened to as long as it seemed to recognise that high authority.

And now, for the first time in centuries—we might almost say in the history of the world—those ideals seem to have a chance. They have been uttered in ears which are open to hear them, and before men who can carry them out. The old is breaking down beneath the impotence of its own dead weight. More completely than in the fifth century, when the Northern barbarians threatened to sweep away the whole civilisation of Rome to leave a new space, as Augustine hoped, for the City of God, we have to-day a clear field. The old habitations of the human spirit have fallen. Something will inevitably be built, sooner or later, in their place. What is it to be?

Such a question was asked once before, in the age of the Jewish exile. Then, the possibilities of world reconstruction seemed even greater than at present. The world of the Jews was far smaller, and the change had not been happening with the same bewildering rapidity. But the old landmarks had disappeared even more completely than to-day. In the two generations that preceded the fall of Jerusalem in 597 B.C., all the political powers that surrounded and dominated the Western half of Asia, with the one exception of Tyre, had been over-run by the "Huns" of the ancient world, the terrible and ruthless legions of Assyria. Ten years before the fall of Jerusalem, Assyria herself had fallen with a crash and Babylon had taken her place. In 586, with the destruction of Jerusalem, the Jewish state finally ceased to be. Before, the field of politics was occupied by a number of little nations, animated by an internecine hate as fierce as that of the

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Balkan peoples, and exploited as cynically as the Balkan countries were exploited by the great Powers ; behind them was the portentous military tyranny of Nineveh ; afterwards, the whole of what we call the Near East was smoothed out beneath the enforced but far from wholly unsympathetic peace imposed by Babylon, with only Tyre and Egypt left to preserve a precarious independence.

Fifty years later, both Babylon and Egypt were to be swept away. Tyre was to be reduced to political insignificance, and the whole Near East was to be mapped out into provinces of a still newer and more stable empire under Cyrus and his successors. Alike for the world, and for what was at least of equal importance for the Jews, Jahve's land of Palestine, a new start had to be made. Amos and Isaiah, more than a century before, had spoken vaguely of vast changes to come. But they had used language in which the literal was hard to disentangle from the figurative. After the fall of Jerusalem, satisfaction with merely figurative language was impossible. One prophet indeed was still alive who could employ the old phraseology. Jeremiah, in 597, was faced by a tragedy which Isaiah in 701 had refused to contemplate. But his outlook was fundamentally the same ; a new vindication of Jahve's law, in the nation and in the hearts of its members. The task of advance he left to his younger contemporary, Ezekiel.

That task was enormous. It was nothing less than the rebuilding of the theocracy ; and rebuilding it out of a heap of rubbish. The problem of Nehemiah when he first visited Jerusalem was nothing to the problem as it faced Ezekiel. What

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was the end to be aimed at ? How much of the old plan was to be preserved ? How could the old materials be adapted to suit the necessary changes ? How could Ezekiel's fellow exiles, dispirited and naturally inclined to idealise the past, be roused either to attempt some work of reconstruction or to recognise the possibility and the necessity of the schemes of the prophet in their midst ?

Moreover, at first sight, no one could have seemed less fitted for his task than Ezekiel. More of a visionary than a prophet, losing himself in trances where his predecessors had grasped the actual political and social situation of their times ; and closely allied to the most conservative and even reactionary element, the priesthood, in a society of *émigrés* always conservative to the backbone, manifesting what could not but seem a passionate detachment from concrete issues, interpreting his people's past in a manner as galling to national pride as it is, to our more critical minds, untruthful to historical fact ; like some "John-a-dreams, unpregnant of his cause," now scolding and now lost in fantasies—what could be expected from any suggestion flung out by such a seer ?

Yet the fact remains that he did reconstruct ; and more, that he alone fully merits the title of reconstructor in the whole historical period of the chosen nation. He formed the plan and shaped the ideals on which later Judaism was built. What he rejected from his scheme was forgotten. What he embodied was retained. The statesmen and soldiers of succeeding years, Nehemiah and the Maccabees, shaped the current events of their time as Ezekiel, beside the River Chebar, could never have done. But they did so as his debtors, or his heirs.

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Without his conception of a renewed Judaism, they would have had no material to work on, no enthusiasm to carry forward. All that has been persistent and fundamental in the Judaism of twenty centuries can be traced back to Ezekiel. He is the father of the Jewish Church.

CHAPTER II

PATRIOTISM TRUE AND FALSE

WHATEVER we may claim for the influence of any one of the prophets on posterity, as a class they knew misgiving far better than hope. Neither schemes nor programmes fill more than a very small portion of their writings. They were above all else critics. Their attitude is one long attack upon their contemporaries. If they foretell the future, it is in the most general terms. Israel being what it is, ruin must follow. Jahve being what he is, redemption must somehow spring out of the ruins. The most definite piece of prophetic prediction, the Messianic Kingdom, is described in studiously vague and figurative language, and only forces its way to the light out of the mass of denunciation at irregular and brief intervals. The prophetic voice is the voice of one crying in the wilderness. Not till the very end of the Exile did its words dwell upon the day when the glory of Jahve should be seen by all flesh.

Ezekiel, for at least the longer portion of his ministry, was no exception to this rule. He learnt the beginnings of his message from Jeremiah, the greatest and severest of the critics of the nation's life, and the master's severest invectives were surpassed by the disciple. Long before Jeremiah, Amos,¹ when he foretold the inevitable downfall

¹ Amos 7¹⁰⁻¹⁷.

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of the Northern Kingdom, was accused of being a revolutionary ; and Jeremiah, when he reminded his fellow-countrymen with almost monotonous reiteration of the uselessness of resistance to Babylon, was branded as a traitor, a "Pro-Chaldean," as we might say. Ezekiel would have earned the same title, doubtless, were it not that his speeches were delivered before an audience which knew too well that Jeremiah was right. Ezekiel suffered what was perhaps a more galling fate. His hearers would not take him seriously.¹

The patriot, indeed, must always run the risk of being called the traitor. To Ahab, Elijah was the man who was responsible for plunging the country into confusion.² In Athens, ostracism could find a victim in an Aristides. The Roman Senate treated the Gracchi as enemies of the State. The English Courts condemned Sir Algernon Sidney. All attacks on the established order of things, however corrupt, have roused violent opposition ; and no other weapon against a political opponent is handier or more deadly than the cry of treason. Ezekiel would have shared Jeremiah's dungeon if he had not lived in a community for which the old established order had already crumbled into the dust.

The patriot, however, is more than the partisan. He stands on no mere party platform. His allegiance is devoted to his country, and to everyone of its parties and classes and interests. Love is a term which men have conspired to use lightly and ambiguously. It varies from an all-absorbing passion for a beloved one, for wife or family, which rises independently of the will, and dominates the whole personality, will, thought and feelings alike,

¹ Ezekiel 33³².

² 1 Kings 18¹⁷.

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to the desire, possibly mean and selfish, of some concrete object, money or land, influence or revenge.

But in neither of these senses can we speak of love of country, or of that still wider and rarer thing, love of humanity. Wordsworth, indeed, might feel for England as "a lover or a child." Pericles could talk of the cultivation of a lover's passion for the city of his birth;¹ but such language belongs rather to analogy or to metaphor. You can fall in love with John or Mary, just as you can arrange for an ornamental piece of water in your garden. But you cannot entertain a passion for millions of unknown men and women, any more than you can provide a place in your back-yard for the Atlantic.

Love, whether its object is the wife of your bosom or the balance at your bank, is intimately associated with possession, real or desired. But the patriot does not desire to possess his country in any such sense. Still less does the humanitarian desire to possess the teeming millions of the world and their vast territories. For him, love has its basis, not in the spontaneous uprush of the emotions, but in the considered and deliberate attitude of the will. It is not a wild desire to possess: it is a settled determination to serve; to secure for its object what it would wish for itself. "A friend is a second self." "*Idem velle, idem nolle, ea demum firme amicitia est.*"² And love, as the patriot knows it, springs from the same fount as that beautiful stream which ancient philosophy glorified under the name of friendship. It is the love that loves one's neighbour as oneself.

Love of oneself, paradox as it sounds, is not necessarily selfish. A certain kind of self-love is

¹ Thuc. ii. 43.

² Aristotle, *Ethics* ix. 1166a; Sallust *Cat.* 20.

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natural, essential. A man serves what he supposes, at least at the moment, to be his chief interest. The wise and good man will always serve what he knows to be his best interests. We should have nothing but blame for him if he did not. But he will also be aware that his own interests are bound up with the interests of others. To serve his own interests, therefore, will also be to serve the interests of others. The patriot therefore is one who serves what he holds to be the best interests of his country, whether they appear at first sight to be advantageous or the reverse to himself, and whether they happen to be popular or unpopular with his fellow-countrymen. The wise and good patriot sets before him his country's highest interests, as little deterred by the claims of party as by the claims of self-advancement or even safety. The humanitarian sets before his mind the true interests of humanity, or that portion of humanity which he can affect, even though he is greeted as a fanatic, a Pharisee, or a faddist, for doing so. It is no light thing to enthrone love, as thus exalted, in one's soul.

But what are these highest interests? Some will complain that the term is too vague to be used as a test either for conduct or character. In reality, it is perfectly intelligible and simple. Writers on ethics have a bad habit, in which they are sometimes followed by religious thinkers, of cutting out the lower rungs of the ladder on which they have climbed, and by which others have to follow. "Happiness lies in the regular and orderly performance of our functions."¹ "Man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy Him for ever." Such maxims do not cease to be true because they are

¹ Aristotle, *Ethics*, i. 1098 a.

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ancient, still less because they are venerable. Our true interests consist in obeying the highest laws and fulfilling the noblest purposes of our proper being. Happiness consists in activity rightly directed and, if not unimpeded, yet assured of ultimate success. This is obviously true as regards the happiness, the well-being, and even the pleasure of the body. It is equally true of the spiritual part of individual men, and of communities. To serve the spiritual interests of mankind is to serve, for their sakes, the ideals of justice, goodwill and purity ; to ensure that they are treated with justice and goodwill by others, even by those who do not naturally wish to do so, as we have been pregnantly reminded, and to ensure also that they can and will embody the same justice and good will in their own actions. In the enunciation of these principles, the supreme authorities are the Hebrew prophets.

It is possible to read the Hebrew prophets as if their patriotism, however exalted, was still narrow ; as if their vision were bounded by the ideal frontiers of the promised land. Nor are we wholly unjust to them in doing this. Jahve was to them the God, primarily, of the nation. And in the days when the frontiers of Israel and Judah were constantly being laid waste by marauding bands from Edom or Ammon and border warfare was almost unbroken, or when the dreaded armies of Assyria and Egypt were a perpetual menace to every town in the land, it is not to be wondered at if the thoughts even of the noblest-minded men turned seldom to internationalism. What community of interests could there be in a world of which Amos' burning indictment¹ was true ?

¹ Amos 1².

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None the less, such a community of interests is the fundamental fact of political life. Nations, like individuals, are made to help, not to tear and devour each other. The common interests are there, however obscured by ignorance and greed. Nor can one nation gain its end unless other nations are gaining theirs. The loss of one is the loss of all. To impoverish your enemy is to impoverish yourself. The harsh measures that rouse hate and a longing for vengeance in a defeated rival simply raise up fresh dangers and hostilities for the victor. The supreme need of every state, as regards its foreign politics, is to be surrounded by other states whose actions obey the canons of justice and honour. If the true well-being of a nation is linked with morality, the well-being of any one nation is dependent on the well-being of all. The war has made us see this more clearly than ever before. The true patriot is the man to whom the well-being of one nation alone is negligible. The man who loves his country is the man who loves every other. To rise by the depression of others is to create for oneself the danger of a further fall. True progress is gained, not in despite of your rivals, but with them at your side.

Even to-day these principles fall strangely on our ears. To suggest that we cannot be loyal to our own country without desiring the real good of Germany or Turkey will sound to most readers something like nonsense. It is not easy, while the mists of war are still drifting before our eyes, to see that a pauperised Germany will never be the good customer needed by British commerce; still less that an exasperated and vengeful Germany will be the greatest enemy of our dreams of future

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peace and security. If these truths are so unfamiliar to our minds, we cannot fairly blame Amos and Ezekiel for being patriots in the narrower sense. Let us admit that they were. But if we allow it, we must also admit that their patriotism, however narrow, was based on the most august foundations.

What then were their ideals for their country? We look in vain for territorial acquisitions, imperialistic dreams. Others may be justified in taking to themselves the proud words,

*"Tu regere imperio populos, Romane, memento,
Parcere subjectis et debellare superbos."*¹

The prophets of Israel looked no further than the frontiers traditionally assigned to them—frontiers almost conterminous with those suggested by wise statesmanship for the Zionist state of to-day; but within those frontiers were to reign righteousness and mercy, justice to the poor, honesty in commerce, frugality combined with comfort in private life and a passionate devotion to the law of Jahve. The oppression of the foreigner was to cease; but not a single prophet laid stress on any victory to be gained by Israel over Assyria or Egypt or even Moab. The formula, "no annexations, no indemnities" might have been invented by the prophetic schools of Jerusalem or Samaria. Theirs was a nobler ambition; the creation of a state whose citizens would break every bond and let the oppressed go free, and in whose streets complaints should be unknown.²

To this spirit, as we shall see, Ezekiel was entirely true. Some few solitary watchers, with the light of the New Testament before them, have

¹ Verg. *Aen.* xi. 851, 3.

² Isaiah 58⁶. Psalm 144¹⁴.

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seen further into the mysteries of the radiant future ; but the true manual of patriotism is still the volume in which the burning words of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and their comrades have set forth for ever the faith that only by justice and honour and mercy can a nation be exalted or preserved.

The splendour of the words, however, must not blind us to the limitations of their speakers. These limitations will be felt by anyone who regards the prophets as serious contributors to the thought of the world. They could not be felt even more acutely by their contemporaries. The prophets are sometimes spoken of a little carelessly, as if they were the politicians of their times. Nothing could be further from the truth. To the actual politicians and statesmen of their country they must have seemed hopelessly perverse or incurably short-sighted. To the harassing problems that beset the statesmen, they refused with unconscionable persistence to pay any attention. To the statesmen, the great danger that threatened the Hebrew nation and its neighbours was the aggressive and terribly efficient military prowess of Mesopotamia ; first Assyria and then Babylon. There was only one great power that could counter-balance the advance from the East, Egypt. Obviously the only possible policy for Israel and Judah was to attach themselves to Egypt. The prophets all disliked the Egyptian alliance.¹ What other course had they to suggest ? None.

Egypt, it is true, was always an uncertain factor. Promise came far more naturally to the ministers of the Pharaoh than performance. Well, then, a good deal might be hoped for from an alliance of

¹ e.g. Isaiah 30², 31¹, 36⁶ ; Jeremiah 37⁷, 46²⁷.

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the smaller states of Palestine and Syria among themselves. Here, too, the prophets were entirely unsympathetic. They wanted complete isolation and independence. "A wholly impossible idea. What protection could then be hoped for?" "Jahve's," was the reply. No wonder that the statesmen hesitated. "These impractical prophets," they exclaimed. The Hebrew "men of the world," though ready enough to believe that Jahve's help was an immense asset, if it could be assured,¹ must have looked on the detached preachers much as men of the world in later times looked at George Fox or Tolstoi. "*Fiat justitia, ruat —patria.*" This principle could hardly be expected to commend itself to men faced by the alternative of national security or personal ruin. We must not blame them too harshly if they could not commit themselves to the belief that what the prophets called "righteousness" could alone enable the bewildered little states of Judah and Israel to survive.

It was indeed a stupendous faith. It is so still. For it has never been put to the test. It is always well to have morality and justice on one's side; but, the prudent diplomatist will add, as allies, not as sole champions. There have been moments when the test seemed about to be applied to a similar faith; as when the French revolutionists were ready to challenge the armed forces of the whole world in single-hearted reliance on their cry of "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity"; or when the Bolsheviki risked the fortune of the millions of Russian troops in Asia and Europe on their Marxist theory of the unity of the International proletariat. But the glory

¹ cf. Hosea 6¹⁻³; Jeremiah 34^{8ff.}

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of these moments was quickly over-clouded. France raised her own armies and flung them against the old monarchical powers ; and then summoned diplomacy to the aid of military force. The Bolsheviks, speedily disillusioned, deserted the ideals of an international proletariat peace to wage an intestine class war. Would the advice of the prophets, "Risk everything on an internal moral reformation," have had more satisfactory results ?

We cannot tell. But at the time, the risk seemed too great to be run by any but a madman. Their words were admired, and neglected. Great characters, who have been far less detached from the immediate and pressing issues of their time, have suffered a like fate. Dante, Milton, Mazzini, can claim admittance to the goodly fellowship of the world's prophets alike in the star-like grandeur of their utterances, and the stolid refusal of their contemporaries to walk by starlight when candles and lamps were available. They were idealists ; and to the statesman ideals make good servants, but highly undesirable masters.

Let us make the confession. Ideals are not enough. Mazzini would have done little for the cause of Italian freedom without Garibaldi and Cavour. Italy needed Garibaldi's ten thousand and the armies of Piedmont even more than the "Duties of Man." Like Dante and Milton, the Hebrew prophets have been far more valuable as sources of inspiration to later times than as guides to their contemporaries. Every reformer must have his ideals. But he must also be able to answer the question, "What is the next thing to be done ?" "What is the first step to take on the new road ?" Such a question will inevitably be asked

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if the reformer's audience is at all serious ; and it can claim an answer. The answer may be as simple, or unexpected, as John the Baptist's answer to the soldiers and the tax-collectors, or as Paul's answer to the Philippian jailor ; but it must be given !

The majority of the prophets did not see this ; Ezekiel did. It was the peculiar advantage of Ezekiel that he lived in circumstances in which he could hardly avoid seeing it. In the first place, the policy of the " practical school," as we may call it, was bankrupt. Any rivalry to be feared from its exponents, from the exiles on the river Chebar, was at an end. In the second place, the community in which he lived was now prepared for the only kind of answer which a man of his training and outlook was likely to give. Devoted to the general conceptions of his predecessors, Ezekiel could have sketched out a scheme of foreign policy as little as Isaiah or Jeremiah. Such a scheme was now at last needless. Foreign politics had ceased to exist for the Hebrews. The future of the chosen people demanded internal reform or it demanded nothing. That internal reform Ezekiel was prepared to work out. Had Isaiah or Jeremiah been in his place, they would probably have accomplished little or nothing. For the time demanded details. They, it would seem, had little patience or aptitude for details. But Ezekiel's was a mind which, for all its many movements, loved detail. He could construct the large plans of the architect. He could pore over the minute specifications of the contractor. He had a mind exactly fitted for the task of reconstruction.

The value of the fashion in which he performed that task we have now to consider. Such a con-

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sideration, let it be added, is not a matter of historical interest alone. For a similar task, as we have seen, lies before ourselves. We have had few examples to guide us. If Ezekiel's reconstruction should prove to have been worth doing, and if we can discover the principles by which he worked, directing his choice alike in preserving, rejecting, inventing, we may learn much that is worth remembering for our own needs. But in order to do this we must first envisage the actual historical conditions of his own time, before we study the method by which he arrived at his results, or attempt to apply them to our own requirements.

CHAPTER III

JUDAH'S DÉBÂCLE

THE modern study of the Old Testament has profoundly modified the earlier conception of Israel as an isolated nation, in which religion played a far larger part than with her neighbours. The records of Assyria and Babylon, the discoveries of archaeologists, and even the Old Testament writings themselves, have shown that for the most part both religious and secular motives influenced her as much, or as little, as they influenced most other organised communities. But there is one significant fact that marks Israel off from all the other nations that have filled a large place in the world's history. These other nations have all had their periods of achievement and glory ; Greece in the splendid age of Marathon and Salamis ; England in the spacious days of Elizabeth and Shakespeare ; France under the brilliant rule of the Grand Monarque ; America when she set herself to substantiate her claim that all men were born free and with the right to the pursuit of happiness ; and even Turkey in the days of her advance towards the heart of Europe.

Israel alone had no golden age ; none, at least, that her sons cared to dwell upon. The victories of David, the pomp and glory of Solomon, the daring foreign policy of Omri and Ahab, never found a *sacer vates*, whose words later ages loved to

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preserve. The only trace of heroic poetry, as we understand it, is to be found in the wild ballad of a sudden and transient combination of the mountain-bred peasants of Israel against Sisera; and when we think of the barbarous act in which it culminated, we are tempted to be thankful that it stands alone. The majestic and half legendary incidents of the escape from Egypt and the advance to the borders of the Promised Land were told again and again by the poets of the later ages; but those poets dwell even more on the perversity and sin of Israel than on the unseconded might of Israel's divine leader. For the Hebrews, to remember the past is not to remember the glories of their ancestors, but to remember the sins of men and the mercy of God in spite of all that men did to repel and frustrate its beneficent activity. The true source of the poetic inspiration of Israel is her decline, punishment and exile.

A curious parallel may be found in the plaintive and haunting national literature of Serbia. Serbia indeed has had a history not unlike that of Palestine. Placed for centuries between powers far greater and more formidable to the world's peace than herself, her existence has been one long struggle for independence. Under the greatest of her kings, Stephen Dushan, in the fourteenth century, she reached for one brief period a height of influence which might be compared with the position of the Hebrew monarchy under Solomon. Then she rapidly lost her national unity in a fierce struggle against the Turks, the Assyrians of the Middle Ages; and with no help from the Greek empire of Constantinople, whose policy of intrigue and "slimness" was not unlike that of ancient Egypt, she fell

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before the Ottoman power, and for four centuries her rugged mountains and valleys became a part of the Ottoman empire. Through all that long period of darkness she kept the flame of freedom burning brightly and fiercely in her heart. Nominally a vassal of Turkey, she maintained so determined a defiance to her masters that they could never securely advance beyond her gates to over-run the wide fields of Austria and Hungary that lay beyond.

The imagination of the Serbian poets and ballad makers has never dwelt long, however, on the glories that preceded her downfall nor the wild struggles for independence that followed it. It has been concentrated on the darkest moment of her history when, in spite of disunion and treachery, she gathered her forces for the deciding struggle on the plain of Kossovo, and saw her noblest sons fallen on the field or driven from it to the inaccessible mountains of Montenegro. There the national spirit of the Southern Slavs was preserved by songs of defeat and disaster, just as the Hebrews, through their long centuries of subjection in Palestine or exile in Babylon and elsewhere, embodied their national hopes in psalms of penitence and confession.

To the political historian, this national poetry conveys a false impression. It fails to do justice to the heroic struggles in which both nations forced their enemies to respect their indomitable valour. Even in her darkest hours, Serbia effectively barred the way to Turkish ambitions in Central Europe, as, in our own days, she broke, even in her defeat and ruin, the designs of Austria and Germany and Turkey on the Balkans. A great line of Hebrew leaders maintained a similar struggle in the eighth and

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seventh centuries before Christ. Omri, Ahab and Hoshea, Hezekiah and Zedekiah did for the ancient world what Dushan, Lazar and the Haiduks or guerilla leaders of the Balkans did for Christian Europe. The inability or carelessness of the religious nationalism of their own and later times to appreciate their aims and achievements must not blind us to the immense value of their opposition to the ruthless militarism of Assyria and Babylon.

This silence of the poets and annalists had its root in a strange and little understood fact, namely, the existence of two distinct patriotisms in Palestine ; the patriotism of the court, the statesmen and the soldiers, and the patriotism of the " pacifist " prophets and their adherents. These adherents, however, though they gave its prevailing tone to subsequent literature, were almost negligible till the official policy was extinguished in the flames that destroyed first Samaria and then Jerusalem. In the northern kingdom, Elijah and Amos, caring nothing, as it would seem, for the national opposition to the great foreign menace from the East, protested in vain against the internal corruption in religion and morals. In the South, Isaiah, while protesting with equal vigour, preserved his relations with the court of Hezekiah. Jeremiah showed few signs of sympathy even with the genuine attempt of Josiah to carry through a reformation in his narrowing territories, and flung himself into irreconcilable opposition to Josiah's successors. At the end of the seventh century, indeed, the prophetic contentions found a dramatic justification in the downfall of Assyria. After a generation in which the power of her once irresistible legions was steadily declining, the terrible danger of her repeated

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invasions was suddenly removed. But this brought no real relief. The position in the little kingdom of Judah, from the point of view of the religious reformer, was as hopeless as it had ever been. Josiah and his ideals had gone. His reforms had proved useless. Egypt, so long the hope of the party of independence and resistance, had been alienated, and the new Chaldean power, organised by the genius of Nebuchadnezzar, was proving more formidable than the fallen empire of Tiglath-Pileser and Sennacherib had ever been. Defeat and the humiliation of exile were now inevitable.

Meanwhile, an internal revolution had been proceeding in Palestine which must be more carefully considered if the true nature of the forces which shaped the hopes of the exiles is to be understood. In the first centuries of their settlement in Palestine, the Hebrews were a nation of small holders. Each family farmed its hereditary patrimony; and the popular ideal of life was for each man to dwell under his own vine and fig-tree. Society was loosely organised in much the same way as among the Scottish clans, or still more as in Serbia. Desires were few; ambitions were fewer. Only when their beloved countryside was threatened would the sturdy peasants join to defend their farms with the tenacity that seems peculiar to mountaineers.¹ Each local centre had its religious as well as its social and industrial life and traditions; Jahve was worshipped at the local shrine; and in spite of the influence of occasional pilgrimages to some larger centre, the priest who ministered there in comparative isolation might easily come to tolerate and even initiate religious practices which to cere-

¹ Judges 5¹⁴, 635; 1 Samuel 13², etc.

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monial purists would seem little better than sheer paganism.¹

Saul, as national war leader, did little to modify this primitive condition of things. But the new monarchy instituted by David and Solomon and continued after the disruption both in Samaria and Jerusalem, set before itself the problem of concentration. In the midst of a population of small farmers there gradually grew up a new plutocracy, based upon foreign trade; and for this, Palestine, weak in metal products, but fortunate in its position astride the main routes of intercontinental commerce, was admirably fitted. But the descendants of Jacob, extraordinary as it sounds to a world which has forced the Jews into trade and finance, never took kindly to commerce as a whole; the denunciations of the prophets against the pride of wealth and avarice echoed the resentment of the mass of the people.² Ahab's interference with the patrimony of Naboth produced an ineffaceable impression. It symbolised a defiance of popular ideals which was becoming intolerable; and it led to the downfall of his house.³

The prophets made themselves the exponents of the reaction against this plutocracy. With the single exception of Isaiah, the pre-exilic prophets were men who sprang from humble circumstances, and small country towns; and Isaiah, with a close knowledge of the luxury and high-handedness of the *parvenus*, was even more outspoken and detailed in his attacks than the rest. The concentration of wealth in the hands of a small class was opposed to

¹ Judges 17¹²; 1 Samuel 13; 1 Samuel 20²⁹.

² Amos 2¹, 4¹; Hosea 5⁵, 8¹⁴; Isaiah 5^{8,22}; Jeremiah 7⁸, 22¹³.

³ 1 Kings 21; 2 Kings 9²⁶.

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the traditions of the race ; and it was felt by the best and most far-seeing minds to be opposed to the true spirit of Israel's religion.

During the seventh century another impulse to centralisation revealed itself in the Southern Kingdom. Jerusalem had long been the religious centre of the nation ; but it had never absorbed the religious life and interests of the people. In spite of tentative efforts on the part of several of the kings, the mass of the people had clung affectionately to the local shrines. Each event of the peasant's life had its religious associations, sowing and harvest, birth and marriage, and the annual family gatherings.¹ To the religious purist it was impossible to keep the village cults free from the pagan influence of the older but still surviving Canaanite population of the country side ; and a movement began among the Jerusalem priests for transferring all public acts of worship to the capital. Josiah, impressed with the political and religious advantages of the scheme, threw himself into its realisation, and in 623 the country shrines were recognised as illegal and doomed to destruction.² Sacrifices were only to be offered at Jerusalem, and the country priests were given subordinate functions in the temple there. The abolition of the shrines was not completely carried out. The habits of centuries are not uprooted in a moment, especially in a people so deeply conservative in religious matters as were the Israelites. Nor did the prophets, themselves thoroughly conservative, show any enthusiasm for the innovation. Jeremiah seems to have maintained an obdurate silence on the subject, though he must have welcomed anything that promised to

¹ Exodus 23¹⁴ ; 1 Samuel 20⁵ : 2 Kings 4²³. ² 2 Kings 23, c^f. Deut. 12¹⁻⁹.

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purge the religion of his people from superstition.¹ Statesmen and politicians speedily found more pressing matters to occupy their attention.

The impulse to religious centralisation, however, found two powerful aids. The first was the real danger of pagan influence. All kinds of superstitious practices tended to survive in isolated and more or less primitive communities. The older stratum of the population had an influence on the villages which it could not exert in the capital. Idolatry lingered on, and fortune-telling, sooth-saying, magic, and the neglect of precautions to secure ceremonial purity could flourish unchecked in remote uplands where Jahve was still addressed as Baal without a protest. It was not surprising that the formula "no worship save at Jerusalem" became authoritative for simple and earnest men who cared as little for the monopoly of the Jerusalem priesthood as for the aggrandisement of the Jerusalem court.

The second aid to this centralisation was equally potent and more tragic. After the fall of the Northern Kingdom, Jerusalem succeeded in maintaining some measure of independence and a certain control over the Southern half of the old realm of David and Solomon. But it could do this only as a vassal of Assyria. Every attempt at defiance or insubordination on its part, and every hostile movement among its neighbours, led to the over-running of its territories, and the burning or looting of its subject towns and villages. The result was a kind of "synoecismus"; a tendency to concentrate in the one secure place in the country,

¹ The extent and the limitations of Josiah's enforcement of this Deuteronomic Reformation may be seen in passages like Jeremiah 11¹⁻¹⁴.

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the capital itself. As life in the country districts grew more disorganised, the narrow streets and winding lanes of Jerusalem grew still more crowded; the small farmers no longer clung to their patrimonies with the tenacity of their grandfathers. Southern Palestine passed through the experiences of Attica in the early years of the Peloponnesian War; families used to the freedom of the fields now had to live cooped up within the city walls.¹ Judah and Jerusalem were fast becoming two names for the same thing.

In this concentration, too, the people never really acquiesced. Jeremiah showed in the plainest fashion his own opinion of the change.² Ezekiel, city-bred as he was, dwells lovingly on the thought of the Judæan hills³; and the prophets of the later exile never forgot the cities of Judah, the "daughters of Jerusalem."⁴ But the compulsion of events was irresistible. By the end of the seventh century the hopes of the conservatives were clearly not to be realised. The protests of the prophets fell on unheeding ears. The whole nation settled down to the dogged and heroic resistance which Jerusalem offered to the enemy from the East. If Egypt could help, so much the better; but even if Egypt was to prove a broken reed, there was to be one city left, the last refuge of the wealth and glory of Israel and the worship of Jahve, which in the surrounding chaos should preserve itself inviolate.

The seventh century was a period of comparative quiet for the Kingdom of Judah. The deliverance of Jerusalem in 701 B.C. marked in effect the begin-

¹ Among those who were thus forced into city life were the Rechabites, Jeremiah 35¹²; cf. Thucydides ii. 15, 17.

² Jeremiah 32⁶⁻¹⁵.

³ Ezekiel 62, 19⁹, 33²⁸, etc.

⁴ Isaiah 40⁹, 44²⁶.

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ning of the decline of the Assyrian power. The drums and trappings of her legions were thenceforward but seldom heard in the Mediterranean coast-lands, and Manasseh, Hezekiah's son and successor, was successful in keeping on good terms with an empire which had no longer the leisure to devote itself to continuous aggression in the West. He showed no wish to carry out the schemes of religious centralisation already attempted in his father's reign and thus forfeited the sympathy of the religious reformers; nor did he manifest any zeal for the prophetic ideals of social reform; tradition therefore has little to say of his long reign but what was evil. But he handed on his realm intact to his son. When Josiah came to the throne in 638, Assyria was already giving way before the growing rivalry of Babylon, and the young king could occupy himself with internal affairs undisturbed by the clash of imperialistic ambitions around his frontiers.

But these ambitions did not lie dormant for long. Inheriting the prestige of Assyria, Babylon also inherited the hostility of Egypt. In 608, just ~~before~~ Nineveh was captured by Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Egypt, Necho, by way of making his bid for supremacy in Asia, led an expedition into Mesopotamia. This could not be done without passing through Palestine. Josiah, free hitherto from the necessity of attaching himself to any of the greater powers, regarded this as an invasion of his own territory and resented the passage of the Egyptian troops. It was Belgium's attempt to resist the German invasion. His army was scattered on the historical battlefield of the plain of Megiddo, and he himself was cut down. His death was the

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signal for the outbreak of confusion. Necho seized the opportunity to turn Judah into a subject kingdom, a valuable bulwark against future aggression on the part of Babylon. Jehoahaz, the popular son of Josiah, was deported by the Egyptians, and his brother Jehoiakim was set on the throne as a tributary monarch. Independence was now impossible; but the influence of Egypt was short-lived. The submission to Necho was quickly transferred to Nebuchadnezzar. In three years, however, the Babylonian yoke was daringly thrown off. Vengeance was prompt, but not complete. Jerusalem somehow maintained herself while her diminishing territories were once more over-run, until in 598 Jehoiakim died. The memoirs of Jeremiah give several vivid pictures of the man.¹ A "realist" in politics, he ruled with a strong hand. The court party, the "junkers," as we might call them, were firmly on his side and the popular opposition, which doubted if opposition to Babylon were really worth while, was kept in check by the most rigorous measures. Jeremiah, who identified the policy of submission to Babylon with the declared will of Jahve, was condemned to imprisonment,² and his writings burnt as traitorous, though the court did not venture to defy the peace party by actually ordering his death.

The methods of Jehoiakim cannot be defended. But it is difficult to pronounce a harsh judgment on the aims of the king. After all, he was only doing what Hezekiah had done a century before, and in the face of even greater difficulties. He might well

¹ Jeremiah 22¹³⁻¹⁹, 26^{21,22}, 36²³; (cf. 2 Kings 24²².)

² As Liebknecht, another Jew, was imprisoned after a "pacifist" speech in the Reichstag, May, 1916.

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have quoted the authority of Isaiah against the disheartening warnings of Jeremiah, and after his death the defiant and now almost desperate policy of resistance was continued. The accession of his young son Jehoiachin was the signal for a fresh and more determined attack on Jerusalem; and the city was at last entered in triumph by the king of Babylon in person. Unlike Necho ten years before, Nebuchadnezzar was not satisfied with imposing a tribute on a vassal king. He subjected the city to a systematic looting; he took captive the whole royal family. He required the surrender of the larger part of the population, civil and military, including the entire aristocracy and the priesthood and the upper classes in general. The enormous host of prisoners was forthwith deported to Babylon.

The end, it seemed, had come. Nothing now could save Jerusalem from the fate of Samaria 120 years before. But Nebuchadnezzar did not himself actually propose to destroy the stubborn mountain fortress, any more than Necho had done after Megiddo. Stripped of all possibility of resistance, the mere shadow of her former self, Jerusalem might yet be an obstacle to future designs on the part of Egypt. While the city was held in the Babylonian interest, no Egyptian force could safely pass through Palestine. So the experiment of putting a subject monarch on the violated throne was tried once more; a brother of Jehoiakim, Zedekiah, was left in the impoverished capital to reign over the mere dregs of the population. The experiment succeeded no better than its predecessors. No sooner had the armies of Nebuchadnezzar departed than the policy of Jehoiakim was revived, and for another ten years

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Nebuchadnezzar had to submit to the defiance of the city he had crushed.

Zedekiah was a less resolute character than his brother ; but the conditions in which the city now found herself led to even more violence. Yet even when a state of siege was almost continuous, there was no " Bolshevism." In spite of the inexperience of her new political leaders, they kept the populace together. Jeremiah indeed was still at large, and his addresses were in the highest degree unwelcome to the " patriotic " party.¹ To them the defence of the city was no betrayal of Jahve's interests. It was a clear championship of His cause and His holy place. Zedekiah wavered between the prophet and his opponents. He allowed Jeremiah to be imprisoned and then he set him at liberty. The situation was certainly a perplexing one.

Meanwhile, as was natural when the end was felt to be drawing nearer, more desperate expedients were tried. Old and half-forgotten social and religious ordinances were revived, and disobeyed² ; new forms of idolatry were practised³ (who could tell if some fresh divine help might not thereby be obtained ?) and protested against. The temple of Jahve itself was made the scene of new and obscure cults.⁴ Ceremonies reported as effectual elsewhere might arouse the aid of Jahve or else of some other divinity hitherto foolishly neglected. Money, too, had to be raised. When events were clearly rushing to some climax or other, men could not stop to listen to the warnings of justice. Opposition to the dominant war party was quenched in blood. But the city still held out.

Could the story be told in full detail, it would

¹ Jeremiah 37, 38.

² Jeremiah 34^{8ff.}

³ Jeremiah 44^{17.}

⁴ Ezekiel 8.

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prove a marvellous record of endurance. With all her leaders powerless in exile, with the flower of her soldiers, her peasants, her workmen torn from her, she still thought of nothing but following the old lines of policy. In 589 the Egyptian Pharaoh, Psamtik, died. He was succeeded by Hophra, who began to revive the traditional schemes of intrigue against the Mesopotamian powers in Syria and Palestine. Jerusalem responded at once. She could never learn that Egypt was no better than a broken reed. But it was too late. She saw at last the Chaldean armies gathering around her walls once more. Every attempt to create a diversion, or to secure a counter-movement from Egypt, had failed. She was left alone. But like a dying lioness she bared her teeth and her claws, and for two years she flung back the beleaguering hosts, while famine stalked through her denuded though still crowded streets. Siege works rose round the doomed city on all sides.

Only when the provisions were exhausted was a breach made in the walls. Then the spirit of the army broke. Under cover of night, the king and his troops left the city and attempted to make the fords of the Jordan near Jericho. The enemy was too quick for him. He was caught, made to watch the execution of his sons, blinded, and carried off to Babylon.¹

Next month, the destruction of the city was taken in hand and carried out systematically. The Temple, the royal palace, and all the principal buildings, were razed to the ground. The walls were flung down. The remainder of the population, with the exception of a few miserable peasants, was

¹ 2 Kings 25¹⁻¹².

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deported. Jeremiah, with a small party, made his way southwards to Egypt. His predictions were fulfilled to the letter. Jerusalem was an unsightly heap of ruins, a horror and a portent. Would she rise again? Or were the City of David and the Temple of Jahve destined to lie desolate for ever?¹

¹ The quarrels of the wretched survivors left in Palestine by Nebuchadnezzar, offer a curious parallel to the revolutionary movements in Central Europe after the armistice. See Jeremiah chh. 40-43.

CHAPTER IV

EZEKIEL'S YOUTH

IN the huge convoy winding its laborious way through Syria to the plains of the Euphrates was one man destined to exert an influence far in advance of any of his contemporaries. The long journey from their homes broke the spirit of the exiles. The eager and restless life of Jerusalem, seething with its factions and rivalries in politics and commerce, was now at an end; and when they reached their new abodes, an apathy descended on statesmen and priests alike which substituted for their old ardour and freedom a cynical questioning of the once trusted power of Jahve and the value of His religion. In his endeavour to destroy every trace of patriotic fervour in the exiles of 597, Nebuchadnezzar might well congratulate himself that he had been completely successful.

But there was one young priest whom not even the enormous calamity of exile nor the despair of his companions could subdue. "*Omne solum forti patria est.*" A brave man is not driven out from his country; he takes it with him. Ezekiel was a man whom it was impossible to exile. When all his friends were giving way to lamentation and grief, he could no more believe that Jerusalem and its Temple were devoted to destruction than he could doubt that the violation of the city would lead to a conspicuous manifestation of the glory of Jahve.

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It is now time to look more closely at the influences which shaped this solitary and commanding character. He was a member of the powerful priestly caste in Jerusalem. As a body of officials the Jerusalem priests may be compared with the established clergy of more modern times. From the day when David brought the ark to his newly conquered citadel, the priests had enjoyed official support and influence. King James' pithy saying, "No bishop, no king," was not the discovery of either Stuarts or Tudors. In every age monarchs have been aware of the support to be gained from an avowed sacerdotal caste. Saul indeed made no secret of his dislike of the priestly families.¹ But David and his successors understood the needs of the throne as Saul never did; and the family of Zadok, placed by Solomon in control of the sumptuous temple which he erected, loyally preserved it in its double function as a royal chapel and a national sanctuary.² When the larger portion of his kingdom, under Jeroboam, broke off its connection with Jerusalem, the first care of the new authority was to establish another royal centre, whose prestige should do for the changing dynasties in Samaria what the temple of Solomon could be trusted to do for the descendants of David.³

††† The sympathies of the priests were thus as naturally monarchical, aristocratic and conservative, as those of a bench of bishops. But the priests were far less closely connected with the highest ecclesiastical dignitaries than English or French bishops have ever been. The lesser towns and the country districts were full of smaller sanctuaries

¹ 1 Samuel 22^{6ff.}

² 1 Kings 44. cf. Ezekiel 40⁴⁵, 43¹⁹, 44¹⁵.

³ 1 Kings 12^{28f.}

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where the priesthood was in some cases at least controlled by the court;¹ but these owed no ecclesiastical allegiance to the capital or the temple; their ritual independence was as thoroughly "congregational" as their finance. Each local priest or Levite (the terms were practically interchangeable) arranged his festivals and celebrations, and drew his fees from his worshippers and neighbours, according to his own abilities or their convenience and generosity.

Clearly, this lack of organisation would be felt as highly unsatisfactory to all parties. It was unsatisfactory to the court and its supporters because a strong monarchy will always desire a united church and dread the influence of dissent, whether in Jerusalem, Byzantium, or Petrograd. It was unsatisfactory to the more worldly section of the Jerusalem priesthood because it kept the people at their own homes and away from the great religious ceremonies at the temple and so diminished their own revenues and importance. It was equally unsatisfactory to the purer and more earnest minds among the priests, because old superstitious practices could not be rooted out and new compromises with the pagan ideas, always so hard to eradicate from Israelite habits, could not be prevented. Hence the success of the centralising measures of Josiah.²

Not that the Temple itself was always free from what the more scrupulous priests felt to be a violation of the purity of Jahve's requirements. Persons of alien birth were employed as servants within its courts.³ The bodies of royal princes were buried within the precincts which ought never to be polluted by the presence of death. In times of

¹ 2 Kings 235.

² See page 40.

³ Ezekiel 44⁶⁻⁹.

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great national stress and terror paganism would break out as flagrantly in the chapels of the Temple as in the obscurest of country shrines.¹

It is therefore not surprising that the priests stood aside from the prophetic and popular ideals of simplicity and moral reformation. They dreaded, it is true, the unauthorised worship of the country-side. And they did not understand or sympathise with the traditions of plain honest dealing among farmers who were all neighbours and kinsfolk of one another. They tended to see life from the standpoint of the courtier, the merchant, the large landlord. The prophets saw it from the standpoint of the farmer and the peasant.² The differences between priest and prophet were not so much religious as economic and social.

If the priests were out of sympathy, however, with the mass of the people, they were the recognised preservers of the traditions of the nation. Even here the want of sympathy with the mind of the people can be detected. In the large body of old stories and folk-tales, told around countless camp-fires and through the long winter nights in scattered farm-steads, tales of the origins of things as they are, of the half-mythical ancestors of the race or the heroes of bygone ages, they took no interest. But they had their own version of these records of the past, gradually shaped and purged from their grosser elements and reduced to a systematic and ordered narrative, and embodying, above all, the sources of the recognised cultus of the religion of the capital city.³

¹ 2 Kings 23¹⁶, 12, 14.

² Amos 1¹; Micah 1¹.

³ Contrast the sections of Genesis attributed to J (popular and prophetic) and P (priestly) in the Commentaries.

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The priests were thus to a large extent the intellectual and educational leaders of Jerusalem; and the impressiveness of their existence gained considerably from the ceremonial restrictions which, like all other priesthoods in ancient society, they carefully preserved. Certain kinds of clothing alone were allowed them; their marriage arrangements were subject to special laws; they avoided all possible contact with death and its pollution; their property could be put to no common or indiscriminate use; they were hedged about with a holiness which, partly physical, partly spiritual, was as solemn as it was mysterious, while their social position, in close relation to the royal court, was the source, possibly, of a good deal of envy, but certainly also of deep-rooted respect.¹

It must not of course be thought that the priests had invented these restrictions for the glorification of their own order. In early society the priest is a very important person. What he does or avoids is of immense consequence to everyone else. If he is to escape mistakes or errors that might bring down the wrath of heaven on the whole community, the most stringent rules must be drawn up for his guidance. His life will become one long observance of "taboos." The same dangers beset the path of the king. In early days, the disadvantages of being a priest, or a king, must almost have outweighed the advantages. Gradually, the penalties that might follow on transgression came to be less thought of than the precautions, and these in turn were looked upon as marks of special honour and prestige. The priestly observance which was at first

¹ Lev. 21, 22^{12, 13}; Ezekiel 44¹⁵⁻²⁷.

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the safeguard of the whole people became the badge of the privilege and pride of a caste.

In such surroundings Ezekiel had passed his early years. From his boyhood he had been trained to take his part in the elaborate functions and to share the somewhat exclusive social and intellectual ideals of the aristocratic priest. When later on he began to write, his style revealed the characteristics we should expect: a wide vocabulary, a distinct love for rare and difficult expressions, and a command of language that passes rather too easily from the flowing to the verbose. His views of the history of his country were such as were taught in the priestly schools.¹ The more popular tales, whose preservation it is now customary to ascribe to prophetic influence, he either ignored or, perhaps, never heard. The conception of holiness, separation from the common or "unclean," which was dominant in the priesthood, he embraced with eagerness, and when the necessity of making a choice arose, he attached himself to the stricter party, viewing all ritual laxity with a horror which is often observable at the period of adolescence and early adult life.

The Temple services had an immense fascination for him, and he came to cherish a passionate love for the Temple itself; he knew every nook and corner of the majestic building; he marked with deep though powerless indignation the base and impure uses to which some parts of it were put;² and he slowly formed a boyish ideal of an edifice even more symmetrical and "four-square" than the actual temple, from which the least trace of contact with merely secular purposes should be expelled;

¹ Ezekiel 16, 23.

² Ezekiel 42¹⁴, 43⁸, 44^{6ff}, 47²².

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where the convenience and pride of the king should no longer force into an unworthy compromise the religious requirements of the priests, and where the glory of Jahve should dwell undisturbed and supreme.

He was a fortunate youth. All that was most inspiring in the nation's life was there to make its contribution to his development. And his experience was enlarged by foreign travel. The Hebrews had never been an altogether home-keeping people. Two centuries before Ezekiel there had been a Hebrew quarter in Damascus.¹ Social and industrial connections between Palestine and Egypt were close, and it is not surprising that the young priest should have gained a detached and first-hand knowledge of Egypt. He also visited the great commercial and shipping centre of the ancient world, the flourishing city of Tyre.² To both Tyre and Egypt he would be in a position to bring important credentials, more important perhaps than those brought by a distinguished traveller from the West, Herodotus, 150 years later. But, unlike Herodotus, he was repelled rather than attracted by what he saw; and he returned to his home convinced that there alone was life really worth living, and there alone could Jahve properly be known. In course of time he married, as every priest was expected to do; and the only reference he ever made in his writings to his marriage clearly shows the complete happiness of the union.³

There were two events, however, which exercised an abiding and authoritative influence over

¹ 1 Kings 20:34.

² It is impossible to read Ezekiel 26-30 without detecting the reminiscences of personal observation.

³ Ezekiel 24:16-18.

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him. The first was the Scythian invasion which occurred during his boyhood.¹ The irresistible advance of those wild, fierce and uncouth barbarians terrified even men who might have considered themselves hardened to the horrors of invasion. But mystery always adds a new intensity to fear. The Hebrews were all at least comparatively familiar with the armies of both Assyria and Egypt. They knew what to expect, and how to protect themselves from the worst dangers. But with these marauders from the unknown North the case was different. No one knew why they came, what they wanted, where they were going. It was not an invasion; it was a visitation from heaven. And when the danger subsided, almost as quickly as it had arisen, the sense of relief was proportionately great. Ezekiel, as a lad, had listened to all the perplexed discussions of his elders on the portent; he had watched the glow of burning villages and towns across the hills; perhaps he had caught sight of the wild horsemen rushing by in the twilight. To him their sudden appearance was a symbol of the defiance of all the chaotic forces of the world launched against Jahve, the lord of order and harmony; and their departure was the final triumph of that order, the final defeat of human rebellion and greed.

The second event was much more complex in its results. It was Ezekiel's meeting with Jeremiah. This meeting produced an ineffaceable impression on Ezekiel. Its complete effects only revealed themselves after an interval; but, as often happens, the change and self-revelation produced by the contact of one ardent nature on another,

¹ Jeremiah 4^{11, 13}, 5¹⁵.

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similar and yet in many respects vitally different, began to show itself from the first moment.

To Ezekiel's friends the influence of Jeremiah came as a disappointing surprise. Both men were priests; but this circumstance, so far from drawing them together, might have been counted on to act as a barrier. For Ezekiel, as we have seen, belonged to the aristocratic and established priesthood of the capital; Jeremiah was a "dissenting" priest from the small country town of Anathoth.¹ Between the two classes there could be little sympathy. The country priests, already suspect for their independence and their inevitable rivalry with the ruling but not altogether popular caste in Jerusalem, had been disestablished by the Reformation carried out by Josiah in 623. Some of them had been content to move into the city and perform subordinate functions at the Temple services.² Jeremiah, however, had taken a line of his own. With no further responsibilities in his own home, he had laid aside his priestly duties and had become known as a prophetic defender of the ideals of the simpler life and morality of the past.

Naturally he forfeited the sympathy of the ecclesiastical authorities by doing so. He lost it all the more completely because he went further and pointedly questioned the validity of ceremonial worship altogether. He even denied the Mosaic origin of the sacrificial rites, and announced, like Amos and Micah, that Jahve was only to be approached by the honest mind and the humble heart.³ It was as difficult for the priests to forgive him as it was for the Jews to forgive Paul, or for Caiaphas to forgive Jesus. And even this was not

¹ Jeremiah 1¹. ² 2 Kings 23^{8,9}. ³ Jeremiah 7²²; Amos 5²¹⁻²⁶; Micah 6¹¹.

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all. At a time when all the deep-seated love of national freedom and independence was girding itself for the last struggle with the military ambitions of the Eastern empire, he openly criticised the policy of the state and bade the champions of freedom submit to the yoke of the foreigner and the heathen.¹

For the circles to which Ezekiel belonged, this religious and political antagonism was deepened by an æsthetic repulsion. Themselves polished, refined, and with the instinct for the repression of individual feelings which so often goes with good manners, they were confronted with a rough and uncouth speaker, whose words rolled from him just as they chose. The young priestly scholar, destined to produce literary work which showed more careful arrangement and studious self-repression than any other Hebrew production, must have listened with dislike and fastidious disapproval to those billowing and unrestrained floods of eloquence.² And yet they mastered him. He became a different man. His friends saw with amazement a change taking place as surprising as when the scion of some aristocratic family in this country suddenly espouses the cause of labour. In Ezekiel, too, we find echoes of the deep sympathy of Jeremiah and the earlier prophets for the miseries of the poor. But, unlike his predecessors, he was never brought into vital contact with them. Like the young aristocrat of social sympathies to-day, he did not speak of them as if he had felt them; the iron had not entered into his soul. He had not, for instance, learnt to

¹ Jeremiah 27¹²⁻²².

² e.g. Contrast Jeremiah 13, 14, 15 with Ezekiel 14, 18. But Ezekiel also could be passionate, cf. chap. 21.

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think of the Sabbath with the authors of Deuteronomy and of the Holiness Code as primarily a rest after the week's toil.¹ But he did speak of the burdens of the poor, and in such a way as to show that he felt the injustice of the attitude that could tolerate them or leave them without a protest.

What was the secret of Jeremiah's influence? In part, it was the sheer violence of the shock. Saul of Tarsus experienced the same shock when he listened to Stephen. Stephen's point of view was so novel, and his confidence so invincible, that Saul had no arguments with which to meet their attacks on his own beliefs. Ezekiel found himself similarly unable to meet the sudden onslaught; the less so, as some of the prophet's contentions unexpectedly appealed to views that had already begun to form themselves in his mind.

For instance, Jeremiah was unsparing in his condemnation of the leading classes in the country.² He went further. He condemned his country's conduct through the past three centuries.³ He described it as so much harlotry. Israel had been affianced to Jahve. She had broken her vows, to carry on scandalous liaisons with surrounding nations and their lustful deities.⁴ The rupture of her agreement with Babylon was only the last illuminating instance of an unfaithfulness which had corrupted her religion and her politics as well. This at all events Ezekiel could not deny. Perhaps he did not feel so deeply as Jeremiah the moral turpitude of Israelite society; but his sensitive vision saw the evidence of Jeremiah's accusation in the compromises with the world which had defiled the ritual

¹ Ezekiel 20¹². Contrast Deut. 5^{12ff.}, Lev. 23³.

² Jeremiah 9²⁻⁸, 5^{26ff.}

³ Jeremiah 7²⁵⁻²⁶.

⁴ Jeremiah 2², 11, 20, 3¹⁻²⁸, 4³⁰, 31³².

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purity of the temple services and precincts. And to admit this was to begin to admit the rest.

Again, Jeremiah was convinced that with such a past, Jerusalem could not hope to weather the gathering storm. She had forfeited her one hope of safety, her purity and obedience. She had alienated her one defender, Jahve Himself. She had left herself, helpless, guilty, to punishment and destruction.¹ Here, too, Ezekiel had to confess that the prophet was right. With all the Puritanic sternness of adolescence, he was ready to go as far as Jeremiah, and even further. And when Jeremiah, suddenly changing his tone, protested that even the ruin of the city could not be the end, that destruction must be followed by restoration, that Jahve could not completely change His mind, and that if He pulled down, it could only be to build up a fairer structure on a more enduring foundation,² Ezekiel was still at one with him. To the religious Israelite, the continued existence of Jahve without Zion was impossible. The only question was, What sort of Zion?

To this question, Jeremiah had a clear answer. Restoration was dependent on a new heart—a new outlook on life in general³; to the Hebrew, the heart is even more the seat of the intellect than of the emotions. The old covenant had been trampled into the dust in Israel's adulterous advances to her paramours. A new covenant was to be accorded to her, whose basis was to rest on purified affections and a new zeal for justice, mercy, and humble dependence on Jahve Himself. And this covenant would be fulfilled, not with a mere remnant,⁴ but with the whole restored and purified nation.

¹ Jeremiah 25, 30¹⁻¹⁰, 34^{19ff.}

³ Jeremiah 31³³.

² e.g. Jeremiah 32^{37ff.}, 33.

⁴ Isaiah 6¹³, 10^{20, 22}.

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Here, Ezekiel might have been expected to hesitate. To the priest, the new *régime* would naturally rest on a new cultus. But it was precisely at this point that Jeremiah revealed to Ezekiel the presence of something in himself that he had hardly suspected. Cultus was not everything. It was only valuable indeed, as the expression of a whole-hearted obedience. The deplorable profanities of the temple worship were, after all, only symptoms. The cause of the disease lay deeper; in the stiff neck and the hard heart that would not order life according to Jahve's commands; that did not, in plain language, really know Jahve at all. Without a new heart, nothing was possible.

In this way, the alarming radical from the country, of whose life Ezekiel knew very little—perhaps nothing more than that he had been imprisoned at various times, and that the roll of his prophecies had been wantonly destroyed¹—found his convert in the exalted ranks of the priesthood. But the adherence of the convert was by no means slavish. Ezekiel's submission was to a set of ideas rather than to a personality. And however complete his submission to those ideas, he pursued his own habit of working out his own conviction for himself. His moral and intellectual rigorism made him at times ready to be more revolutionary than his teacher.

Jeremiah, a kind of Hebrew tribune of the people, was still a supporter of the idea of the monarchy. Ill-treated as he had been by Jehoiakim, he was none the less unable to conceive the restored state without a king descended from the Davidic house upon its throne.² Ezekiel's own mind moved faster. Why should there be a king at all?

¹ Jeremiah 36.

² Jeremiah 33¹⁷.

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Previous kings had done little enough, he felt, either for the state or the temple. In any future constitution the place of the king should be taken by a prince or a representative of the whole people; but he must no more be the head of the church than he must be able to found a dynasty.¹ There must be no interference with the principle that the one true head and king of the nation is Jahve Himself. He would have sympathised with the old writer who held that the choice of Saul as king was an act of infidelity to Jahve.²

Similarly with the proverb now on everyone's lips: "the fathers have eaten sour grapes and the children's teeth are set on edge." "Yes," said Jeremiah, alluding to the question one day, "it is so now; but only for a time. In the future, such vicarious punishment will be unknown."³ Ezekiel listened with convinced dissent. How could Jahve follow two rules of conduct, one now and one in the future? And how could vicarious punishment ever be just? As a matter of fact, it did not exist. If the children's teeth were set on edge, it must be because they had been eating sour grapes as greedily as their fathers. No one dies for another's sin; but no one escapes the consequences of his own.⁴

In truth, the young priest, listening so keenly on the edge of the crowds which gathered round Jeremiah, was entirely honest; but he was also independent. He never entirely accepted Jeremiah's scorn for cultus and public worship. To Jeremiah, sacrifices might have been dispensed with altogether. They occupied as small a space in his conception of true religion as in that of Paul.

¹ Ezekiel 46¹⁶⁻¹⁸; p 199. ² 1 Samuel 8¹⁰⁻²². ³ Jeremiah 31^{29f.} ⁴ Ezekiel 18^{2ff.}

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Ezekiel could not imagine a religious life in which they played no part. True, they were not everything. To regard them as ends in themselves only opened the door to corruption. But as preservatives of the true purity of attitude to Jahve, and as means of communion with Him, unbroken and confident, they were essential.¹

It was no easy position in which Ezekiel now found himself. He had certainly not become a member of the prophetic party as led by Jeremiah; he could be no understudy to Baruch, Jeremiah's amanuensis and "secretary." And yet he had broken with the priests. At best, his sympathies were with the priests of a by-gone age, who had compiled that Deuteronomic Code which had so strongly influenced Josiah, the code in which moral rectitude and ritual purity received almost equal emphasis. But those priests had no successors in the last days of Jerusalem; and Ezekiel saw clearly that if he were ever to voice the convictions now growing stronger within him, he would be as lonely as was Jeremiah himself, when first he began to preach.

For men as sensitive in their different ways as Jeremiah and Ezekiel, such loneliness had positive terrors. But each found consolation and support in an overpowering and continuous experience, that of free intercourse with Jahve. To the ordinary Israelite, Jahve was an invisible monarch, with all a monarch's arbitrariness, insistence on his prerogatives, and attachment to his court, his capital and his people. To the prophets, that arbitrariness was replaced by a steadfast and unwavering righteousness in all Jahve's relations with His own and foreign peoples. More than that, Jahve had drawn

¹ Ezekiel 20⁴⁰, 22^{7,8,26}, 23³⁹.

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the prophet into the inner circle of His own familiars. He was no "father in heaven"; still less was He, in our language, a spirit who moved within the heart of His worshippers. But with regal condescension, He revealed His mind to the prophet, and laid His hand—sometimes with appalling weight—upon him; but He would also allow the prophet to argue and even expostulate with Him.¹ Such was the experience of Jeremiah after the illuminating moment that constituted his "call." Ezekiel had experienced no such call as yet. When it came, after he had left the city for ever, it accentuated while it transfigured his sense of isolation.²

But even before that supreme moment, the sense of isolation had long been present with him. For there was in him a distinct strain of psychical abnormality. Probably most people are to some slight extent abnormal. Psychology has not yet succeeded in drawing a clear and firm line round the absolutely normal and regular; and abnormality may easily be made to appear larger and more striking than it really is. Psychical experiences have to be described in the first instance by the subject of them, and the pre-conceptions of the subject inevitably influence his narrative, whether it tells of a single succession of thoughts and ideas and memories, conscious or sub-conscious, or whether it is full of supernatural voices, visions and startling revelations from another world. Sometimes the suggested abnormality is a mere matter of language, as where Amos and Isaiah preface their experience or addresses with "Jahve showed me," or "Jahve said unto me";³ or where Bunyan throws his

¹ Amos 37; Jeremiah 12¹⁻⁶, 20⁷⁻⁹; Habakkuk 1¹³⁻¹⁷; Ezekiel 13.

² Ezekiel 2.

³ Amos 7^{1,4,7}; Isaiah 6¹, 8¹.

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thoughts into the literary medium of the description of a dream, or where Blake attributes the origin of every statement that he regards as a lie to the whisper of an angel, and of some deep-seated truth to the instruction of the devil.

Ezekiel, however, reveals a nature which in one respect at least appeared distinctly unbalanced. Intellectually, he was devoted to system and order; he worked his ideas and hopes into a consistent whole; he could not, like Jeremiah, at one moment implore Jahve to take vengeance on his obstinate and hard-hearted contemporaries, and the next beg for their forgiveness and restoration.¹ Apart from quite transient impulses of regret or horror, his thoughts exhibit a careful and even exaggerated consistency. Every principle is worked relentlessly out to its logical conclusion.

Emotionally, he was very different. Strange storms of excitement would sweep across him. The calmness of the scholar would be lost in the passion of the poet or even in what seemed to his friends like the ravings of the dervish.²

Had this inability stood by itself, it would not have called for much remark. The Hebrews were always subject to quick changes of mind, changes which can be studied with great profit, for instance, by the psychologist in the letters of Paul of Tarsus. Ezekiel, like Paul, introduces us to other and less common phenomena, of trance, clairvoyance and abnormal vision. Here, too, he was only carrying one stage further the characteristics of his race. The Hebrew codes are full of warnings against resort to wizards, soothsayers, and the owners of "familiar

¹ Jeremiah 11²⁰, 147.

² cf. Ezekiel 4¹⁵, 8²⁻¹¹, 21⁵, 43³⁻⁵ and p. 110.

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spirits.”¹ These much-sought-after yet unfortunate persons, like the witches of the seventeenth century, were generally the victims of their own peculiar and misunderstood gifts. The methods of the witch of Endor were simply those of a modern medium described in the language of the tenth century B.C.² Gifts like “second sight,” inflictions like “possession,” have been peculiar to no one age or country; the Hebrews simply had a share in them a little larger than usual.

But even in an age when visions and trances and miracles in general called for no criticism and only aroused wonder, as the rare but quite natural breaking in of another world upon this one of ours, Ezekiel stood apart from his contemporaries. Had he been the country priest, attached to a little retired shrine, like another Jeremiah, he might have gained a local reputation for the vigour and detail of the pronouncements of the spirits whom he could summon from the vast deep of Sheol. But such practices, though not unknown in the capital, during the dark days of Jehoiakim, were to him sheer abomination. He was the servant, not the master, of his experiences. Trance, clairvoyance, clair-audience (to use our modern scientific or quasi-scientific terminology) could only be interpreted by him as the result of the direct intercourse of the spirit or breath of Jahve on his mind. He felt their weight. He was overpowered, rendered speechless, by them. He was to walk, as he described it later, in bitterness because of them.³ From his allusions to the psychical effects they produced, some ~~some~~ have suggested that he even at times became a cataleptic.

¹ Exodus 22¹⁸, Lev. 19³¹, Deut. 18¹⁰.

² 1 Samuel 28^{ff.}

³ Ezekiel 3¹⁴.

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On this point we shall do well to be cautious. His descriptions of himself, as he recalled his own overmastering times of excitement and "subliminal uprush," must not be identified with the diagnosis of a skilled psycho-therapist. One thing we do know, that the mind of a sufferer from that painful disease was not the clear, incisive and logical mind of Ezekiel. In his case, at any rate, the spirits of the prophets were subject to the prophets. We might as well suppose, as some short-sighted persons have actually done, that Paul suffered from epilepsy. No epileptic ever thought and worked and loved as Paul did throughout his long and magnificent life. And Ezekiel, destined as he was to move among supernatural visions, and hear voices inaudible to all around him, to walk among his friends with a forehead "as an adamant harder than a flint" in the extremity of his isolation, retained to the end the sanity of his judgment and the consistency of his convictions.

No wonder that he puzzled his contemporaries as he has repelled his readers. A townsman, yet a passionate lover of the mountains of his country; a stern and even harsh Puritan, yet a devotee of ritual and an ardent High-churchman; a logician and a poet; a statesman and a dreamer of dreams; a master of simple and direct style, and a visionary whose thoughts continually "break through language and escape," he yet was able to mould the thoughts and hopes of his age as no one of his race had ever succeeded in doing before him; and the walls of the fair city whose radiance he caught have enclosed the most daring and sacred inspirations of every seer who has reminded a disheartened and struggling world that "the city of God remaineth."

CHAPTER V

IN EXILE

OUR account of the influences at work in Ezekiel's mind in the days before he left Jerusalem for ever may seem to have rather anticipated matters. His public work only began four years after he had reached Babylon, and we have no record of anything that he said or wrote before that time. But great convictions are not formed in a moment. The reformer and the pioneer may not be conscious of this truth. To them the new and illuminating idea often seems to spring forth fully grown in a moment of inspiration. They are not aware of the long process of incubation that has gone before.

Which of us has not been surprised to find, scattered in old notebooks or stray sentences in a letter or a diary, anticipations of a belief which we had greeted as novel, it may be years afterwards? The message of the new covenant,¹ the disgust to be felt for the horrors of the shameful past,² and the triumphant restoration of the nation and the temple³ which found their complete and startling expression in the years of exile, would have been impossible but for the pervasive yet often unsuspected influence of Jeremiah, the hours spent each day in the temple courts, with their beauty and their

¹ Ezekiel 34²⁵, 37²⁶, cf. Jeremiah 31³⁷.

² Ezekiel 22, 23, cf. Jeremiah 2.

³ Ezekiel 40^{ff.}, cf. Jeremiah 30¹²⁻²², 33.

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misuse, and the ardent devotion to a priesthood, corrupt and decadent, yet containing within itself the only sure hope of an enduring obedience to Jahve.

The materials of the great scheme of restoration were thus being gathered before the downfall actually took place. But when the melancholy convoy left the deflowered city, Ezekiel's thoughts were fixed on the present rather than the future. Like all true agents of reconstruction, he had no mind to build castles in the air. His first concern and interest was with the concrete needs he saw around him. The questions, the laments, the despair of his companions filled his mind; and not only on the journey to the new home, but for years afterwards, these occupied his whole conscious attention. The task of reconstruction demanded more than the clearing away of the old and rotten political situation. Ideas as well as institutions had to be removed. It was necessary first to create a new faith.

This then was the first task of the young priest; and for those who appreciate his strange position, it was perhaps the hardest. In the men left behind in Jerusalem, within the shelter of the still standing walls, with the historical memorials of a glorious past calling to them for one more gallant blow for freedom, confidence in the destiny of the city still glowed with the sinister crimson of a stormy sunset.¹ For the exiles, nothing was left save the darkness of the gathering night. To them, as to the unknown narrator of the last years of the Kingdom, the men who had been left behind were a mere rabble, their leaders wild and unskilled demagogues.² No

¹ cf Jeremiah 384.

² 2 Kings 24¹⁴; Jeremiah 24^{5,8}.

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more could be hoped for from them than an old-fashioned Athenian, after the death of Pericles, could hope for from Cleon and his associates. It would have been better, they must have said to themselves, if the city had been finally depopulated rather than left to a set of guides who could only show themselves either helpless or mad. Their thoughts were the thoughts of the *émigrés* who heard of Louis XVI. installed in the Tuileries or of the forlorn survivors of Sedan when Paris was given up to the fury of the Commune.

The wholesale deportations carried out by the conquerors from Assyria and Babylon have been repeated, to the amazement of the civilised world, in the last few years. But there was a bitterness in the cup of the exiles from Judah untasted by Belgium or even Serbia. In the darkest hours of 1914 and 1915, all was not lost. The legions of the Central Powers were as irresistible, wherever they set their devastating feet, as the mail-clad warriors of Nebuchadnezzar. But they could not set their feet upon the sea. The navy of the Allies might still do what the armies of the Allies had failed to accomplish. One little strip of Belgium was still untrodden by the enemy. And though no inch of Serbian territory could now pay allegiance to King Peter, the remnants of the Serbian army still existed, and one day—what loyal Serbian could doubt it?—would advance, re-fitted and victorious, through Prilep to Belgrade.

The departing Hebrews could nourish no such expectations. Armenia alone in these days has shown a spectacle of more abject hopelessness. For the Hebrews, no friendly sea-power was biding its time. No army was left to keep watch

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on the frontiers of the ravished country. Their beloved city was no longer to them the gaunt lioness, wounded and starving, but furious and still formidable¹ she was like an outraged girl, flung aside with torn shift by the brutality of the invading soldiery, and sitting, half maddened by grief, on a heap of broken furniture and household refuse, waiting for death.²

Worse than this, the fall of their nation was the death-blow of their religion. Before the blow had actually fallen, they had passed through months of famine and plague. Town after town had been lost; homeless refugees had crowded into the lanes and open spaces of the city, making the difficulties of food and water more troublesome than ever; party strife had made the streets red with blood. But Jahve had still a place in which to be worshipped, and a free people to do Him honour.

Now all this was at an end. The nation and the land were degraded,³ and what was still worse, Jahve was degraded as well. He was left with neither worshippers, power, nor prestige. It is difficult for us to appreciate the value of locality in ancient religion. God, people and land, for the Hebrews as for their neighbours, formed a kind of three-fold cord. To cut one of the strands was to destroy all three. More than a century before, the inhabitants of Jerusalem had trembled at the taunts of Sennacherib's envoys. "You pin your trust to Jahve. Hamath, Ivah, Sepharvaim, pinned their trust to their own gods. What are those gods to-day? As helpless as the cities they were unable to protect from our swords. You will find that Jahve is no better or stronger than they."⁴

¹ Ezekiel 19¹⁻⁹.

² Ezekiel 23⁴⁶.

³ Ezekiel 36³.

⁴ 2 Kings 18^{33f}.

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The Rabshakeh was mistaken. Jahve on that occasion proved himself stronger than all the horse-men of Assyria. But that was long ago. Something had happened to Jahve in the meantime. He had grown tired of caring for His people; or else He had become too weak to protect them. Either supposition was paralysing. It meant for them an incurable rupture with their God, and the end of all the confidence that had sustained them through generations of adversity and disappointment. To the taunt of their conquerors: "Where is your god now?" they had no answer. A nation without a god was as forlorn a thing as a god without a people.

Such were the numbing reflections with which the exiles, "hardly bested and hungry, fretting themselves and cursing by their king and their god, driven away into thick darkness,"¹ turned for a final and lingering look on the mountains of Judah, which they were never to see again. What wonder if some of them bitterly recollected the grim words of the ancient prophecy of Isaiah—how little understood till then: "until the forsaken places be many in the midst of the land. And if there be yet a tenth in it, it shall be eaten up, like a felled oak, with only the stump left standing."² A tenth was indeed left; a gaunt stump to show where the once goodly tree had flourished. And what could be hoped from a mere stump? Where now was to spring the shoot out of the stem of Jesse, who was to smite the tyrant with the rod of his mouth? Instead of that, they were leaving behind them only the feeble Zedekiah and his ignorant and desperate counsellors.

¹ Isaiah 8^{21f.}

² Isaiah 6^{11-13.}

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At last the journey round the desert through Syria and the northern plains of the Euphrates came to an end, and the exiles reached their new home. Here they were met by a welcome surprise. Their lot, they found, was not to be one of unmitigated hardship. They were to be allowed to form communities of their own, to live in some sort of independence, and to engage in industry and commerce. So long as they were willing to refrain from political activity, and pay the dues demanded of them by the state, they were to be left unmolested. To meddle in politics would have been as dangerous for them as for resident strangers in Russia under the old *régime*. But they were not forced, like the survivors of the Northern Kingdom, who had been carried off to Nineveh, to lose themselves in the surrounding population. In fact, they could commence learning the lesson which has preserved their identity through the succeeding ages, of "keeping themselves to themselves." And they could do this the better because they could even maintain communications with their old home in Palestine.¹ Ezekiel had his own house at Tel-Abib, and from the Hebrew form of its name, the Jews would seem to have had the place to themselves.² Nebuchadnezzar was a shrewd politician. He argued that these turbulent Hebrews would give him far less trouble if he allowed them the means of a fairly contented life, than if he harassed them with constant and irritating restrictions. Let them learn to settle down and be comfortable. Immigrants have often made, in the end, the best and most industrious citizens, as our own country is well aware.

His expectations were not wholly disappointed.

¹ Jeremiah 29 ; Ezekiel 33²¹.

² Ezekiel 3¹⁵ C.B.

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The exiles, though keeping in touch with the "remnant" in Palestine, attempted no political action. Some of them, at all events, began to make the best of their new life. In this they had the encouragement of Jeremiah. A long letter from him has been preserved,¹ whose delivery Nebuchadnezzar was doubtless very pleased to facilitate, in which he told the exiles that they were to expect no return for themselves and must settle down therefore as best they could in Babylon.

For this course there was much to be said. True, there could be no proper or complete worship where there was no temple, and where the very soil was polluted and heathen. How would one worship Jahve, the lord of Palestine, in a foreign land? But the weekly Sabbath could be honoured there as in Palestine itself; the children could still be circumcised eight days after birth, and so dedicated to Jahve like their fathers; and the old books and records of the past could be preserved and studied. These early years of exile saw the beginnings of the close study of the written word, the meticulous preservation and expansion of tradition by which the Babylonian scholars made of Judaism the religion of the book.

But there were others who would not so tamely follow the line of least resistance. The very contrast between the ease of their new circumstances and the turmoil of the old life in Jerusalem made them look back to the past with an almost fanatical longing. "If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget its skill."² Such men, had they power, would have killed the very infants of their captors in their hate. How feeble must have seemed

¹ Jeremiah 29.

² Psalm 137.

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the exhortations of Jeremiah, always a friend of their country's foes, as they said, to such fiery patriots. And although, such was the misery of their situation, they could accomplish nothing at the moment, they could keep up the intercourse with Jerusalem; perhaps in time something might be contrived with the help of even Zedekiah.

Beside all this was the unceasing religious ferment. The danger of a widespread apostasy was really very serious. Apart from the shock to faith caused by the capture and depopulation of Jerusalem, the exiles, on reaching Babylon, had yet stronger inducements to doubt the power and even the existence of Jahve. In the comparative isolation of their old home, their traditional religion was the most impressive thing they knew. Their temple had no rivals in beauty or grandeur, and the worshippers of foreign deities were an insignificant and fluctuating minority. Now, they were plunged in the centre of the life and achievements and glamour of the whole ancient world. It was as if a Montenegrin who had spent all his life in Cetinje were suddenly transported to Paris or London.

The civilisation in which they found themselves was a far bigger thing than any they had known in Palestine; yet it cared nothing for their own religious laws, nor thought of them save as a provincial and half barbarous code; and the imposing worship at the enormous temples of Bel and Nebo diminished the ceremonies on Mount Zion to the importance of a small local cult. It was as difficult for them to resist the impact of the pagan but magnificent religion of Babylon as for a sensitive lad, brought up at some "wee free" sanctuary in the North of Scotland, to resist the impact of the

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splendid services of St. Paul's or Westminster Abbey.

Difficult, but not impossible. One of the miracles in the history of religion is the survival of the Hebrew faith in Jahve throughout the exile. Indeed, at least on the choicer spirits among the Hebrews, the imposing civilisation of Babylon seems to have made no effect at the time. Their thoughts were entirely occupied with the homes they had left and their attempts to produce something of the life they had lived there. Of such a tendency Ezekiel is typical. Later on in the exile, the great prophet whose works are included in those of the earlier Isaiah makes constant references to Babylon, its religion and its daily life. In Ezekiel such references do not exist. There is one curious piece of evidence to show that he was not unacquainted with Babylonian literature.¹ But he would have repudiated with passion the suggestion that it ever exercised any influence on his thought. His eyes must have rested every day on the conspicuous tower of the temple at Nippur, a few miles from his home. To judge from the plans for the new temple which he was to elaborate later on, he might never have seen it. He never hints that he is thinking of anything but the wide spaces and low buildings of Solomon's Temple.

That Babylonian literature did influence Hebrew thought and religion cannot for a moment be denied. The early chapters of Genesis attach themselves closely to the Babylonian stories which can now be studied in an increasing number of documents. And there are distinct traces of Babylonian, as of later Persian, religious views in the theology of Judaism.

¹ See p. 103.

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What cannot be proved is that this influence took effect in the earlier years of the exile. Early intercourse between the Euphrates valley and Palestine, of which there is abundant evidence, will account for the striking Babylonian element in Hebrew cosmogonies, both popular and priestly. The latter, it is true, meet us in a shape which is post-exilic, but they show no more of what is distinctly Babylonian than the former, which are certainly pre-exilic; and though their shape is late, the conservative tendencies of the priestly caste are enough to make it probable that their substance is early. The influence of Babylon, like that of Persia, on theology, does not appear till a later stage of history, and its extent may easily be exaggerated. In any case, Babylon, during the earlier years of the exile, would seem to have exerted as little influence on Hebrew religious thought as did Egypt during the sojourn there seven centuries before. But for those for whom the dangers of apostasy were least, other dangers were correspondingly formidable. Why had they, in their own generation, been marked down for such suffering? Surely, others had sinned more deeply than they. Jahve's action was unfair, to say the least; "unequal," as they put it.¹ Innocence was a bad investment. The most scrupulous piety was evidently of no avail. Did Jahve really trouble Himself about human affairs at all? Did He even see the pride of the oppressor, the sufferings of impoverished honesty? Was it not better to neglect the "absentee" ruler, and make the best of the world as they found it in Babylon?

^ Such questions assailed Ezekiel again and again in the long enforced leisure of his new life. He

¹ Ezekiel 18²⁵⁻²⁹.

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moved, like Hamlet, in a world of clashing and often contradictory ideas and emotions; what wonder if, like Hamlet, he found the violence of the internal struggle paralysing him for outward action? None of his friends felt more keenly than he the separation from his home, from the temple and the whole ordered life of the priestly circle. And with him, the constant presence of Chaldean idolatry roused a positive and abiding disgust. He at least was in no danger of saluting the gross and licentious gods of the heathen.

This disgust roused in his mind another. As he sat through the long days beside the Chebar canal, so different from the impetuous Kidron that flowed beneath his own beloved temple hill, he came to see in a clearer light the meaning of his country's past history. It had all been one miserable piece of disobedience. No one age was less guilty than the rest; no one class could claim credit for piety over any other. No reformer had ever appeared to recall the nation to its rightful mind. The accumulated sins had outraged Jahve; they had polluted the very land in which He had set His unfaithful people. And now the land itself which, as men said, had been a devourer of its people,¹ had cast them out. There was nothing else for it. And so it must lie desolate and exhausted till the people should repent and be fit to dwell in it again.²

Repentance; change of heart; how was this possible? He did not yet know. But of one thing he was certain; it must come. He was certain of this, because he was so certain of Jahve. To Ezekiel and to his contemporaries, as we have seen, Jahve was not the Father in heaven. He was

¹ Ezekiel 36¹³; cf Lev. 18²⁸, 20²².

² Ezekiel 20³³⁻⁴⁴, 22, 36^{14f}.

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a great heavenly monarch, ruling for His own glory, and determined to vindicate His own majesty and power.¹ The difference between Ezekiel and the other men of his time—and it was vital—consisted in this, that to Ezekiel, Jahve's glory was the manifestation of His moral sublimity, and His power was the enforcement of His eternal laws of righteousness and purity. "For my own name's sake." "They shall know that I am Jahve." Such expressions as these suggest to us the self-assertion of the tribal god, exploiting the fate of his worshippers for his own aggrandisement. To Ezekiel they meant something entirely different. They meant that Jahve's actions were not capricious or variable; that they resulted from the inner stability of His character and His irrevocable and unshakeable will. No gusts of passion, no sudden bursts of rage, could influence His judgments; nor could tenderness or unlooked-for impulses of compassion bend the sternness of His sentences. Jahve was the great I AM. He was the God who made all the varied wonder of the earth in an orderly six days' programme; not the ingenious and warm-hearted heavenly craftsman who had moulded the dust into a human form, cross-examined His erring creatures in the park He had laid out for them, and finally wished He had never made human beings at all.²

The acts of Jahve all sprang from a divine *ἀνάγκη*, an unalterable necessity. But what were those acts? The ruin of Jerusalem, certainly. But not the ruin only. Only half the ways of Jahve to men could be justified by punishment. If Israel was left like some poor Arab girl cast out by her tribe as an abortion and weltering in her

¹ Ezekiel 20³³, 36^{22, 23}, 39²⁸.

² Gen. 1²⁷ (P), Gen. 27, 3¹¹, 6⁶ (J).

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blood,¹ how could Jahve be known among men at all? That He should be worshipped in a stable and law-abiding community was a necessity. And this community could only be Israel, an Israel restored, converted, forgiven. Restoration was thus an absolute certainty. It depended neither on Babylon's downfall or Israel's transformation, but on Jahve Himself.

✧ Thus, what was to others a problem or a perplexity was to Ezekiel a clear indication of the future. All the horrors of exile were inevitable. That long disease, the political and religious life of Israel, could have no other ending. Jahve would have denied Himself if charms or prayers could have availed with Him to turn Him from the drastic operation. Noah and Job, Moses and Jeremiah, would all have made this attempt in vain.² ✧ But, once the old putrid mass was cut away, the celestial surgeon was bound to complete His work. Into the exhausted patient, lying in the helplessness of a corpse, the breath of life would be poured; and the nation whose existence was essential to the majesty of Jahve would leap up into the vigour of renewed and safe-guarded virtue.

A century after Ezekiel, in the far-off coastlands of Greece, another great thinker was brooding over the mysteries of human pride and divine penalty. He saw the inevitable mystery of the fall; he could only hope for some healing touch beyond.

*αἶλινον αἶλινον εἶπε, τὸ δ' εὖ νικάτω.*³

✧ Ezekiel was troubled by none of the uncertainties of hope. He had not even, like his prophetic forerunners, two certainties to hold, side by side. Justice and mercy were not two divine impulses,

¹ Ezekiel 166.

² Ezekiel 1414; cf. Jeremiah 151.

³ Aeschylus *Agam.* 121.

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one of which would rouse itself when the other was exhausted. Disobedience, ruin, return, repentance, piety and the blessing of Jahve's presence in the midst of the nation, were all acts in a stupendous drama. It was a drama whose conclusion was implicit in its earliest action, and whose successive stages were linked together by the mechanism of an august yet wholly reasonable and intelligible will.

Ezekiel was a Calvinist. Perhaps he was the most thorough-going Calvinist who ever lived. But his Calvinism was not that of Isaiah or Jeremiah, symbolised by the potter's power over the clay.¹ Nor was it that of Augustine or Duns Scotus or Calvin himself, with a belief in a God who could by virtue of His divine supremacy make anything He chose right or wrong, and doom one soul as it pleased Him to infinite bliss and another to infinite woe. It was rather the Calvinism of the "unalterable laws of science." Ezekiel knew nothing about the theory of the uniformity of nature; the very conception of nature, indeed, is foreign to the Hebrew mind. But he was deeply convinced of the uniformity of Jahve. Once recognise His power, His holiness, His justice, and all else will follow, as the night the day. The welter of human destiny grows clear to the mind that sees the presence of

"A motion and a spirit that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
And rolls through all things."

The priestly conception of the ordered and harmonious rule of Jahve, sensitive to all violation of its holiness and authority, but supreme in its mastery over every event in the world's history, found its ultimate and classical expression in Ezekiel.

¹ Isaiah 45⁶, 64⁸; Jeremiah 18¹⁻¹².

CHAPTER VI

THE BEGINNINGS

THE processes of nature are gradual, yet sudden. Prolonged, imperceptible changes made under the surface of things are followed by a visible and startling bursting forth of the new from the old. The lava stream, breaking out impetuously over the rim of the crater, has been preparing for weeks, perhaps for years, within the deep womb of the earth. The flower suddenly loosing the tip of petal after petal, has been acquiring strength slowly and silently for the beautiful rapidity of the event. The child has lain for months within the chamber of its mother's body before it makes its catastrophic entry into the world.

It is the same with these great movements of the human mind to which we give the name of conversion or call. Augustine and Luther, Bunyan and Wesley, have all made clear those long periods of gestation when nothing seemed to be happening within them. But apart from these there would have been no mysterious voice sounding in the garden at Milan, "*Tolle lege*"; no moment of a strange warming of the heart in a little room off Aldersgate Street." Nor would there have been a blinding flash of more than solar light on the road to Damascus.

Ezekiel was no exception to this rule. As we have noticed, the message by which he left an enduring mark on the world was preparing for many

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years, before it was actually spoken. And the overwhelming experience which, as he always subsequently felt, turned the current of his life, was itself the result of long previous processes of thought. In the new world of exile, he lived as one of his companions. He shared their initial hardships, their home-sickness, their unavailing regrets, their eager desire, not unmingled with contempt, to know what the *parvenu* statesmen were doing in Jerusalem, and the humble activities by which they began to build up the structure of their own new life. X

And yet, he was different. The truths he saw so clearly they would not see, or could not understand. A light, sinister yet revealing, had been vouchsafed to him which was hidden from their duller eyes. He felt as Isaiah must have felt, as Jeremiah certainly did feel. Could it be that he was to tread their exalted and lonely path? They had been summoned to do the work of a prophet. Would such a summons come to him? Without it, he knew himself to be helpless. How could he overcome the stolid apathy, the blank incredulity around him? How could he, still no more than a youth, assail the rooted convictions, the deep-seated self-complacency, the deadened conscience of the exiled politicians and priests who led the society of which he was, after all, a quite inconspicuous member? X

His own word would be useless. It must be Jahve's word, as with the older prophets, or nothing. Even Jeremiah could do nothing without Jahve. And if the summons should be granted him, how would it come? Not, certainly, as it came to Isaiah in the temple court he knew so well.¹ There would

¹ Isaiah 61-10.

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be no angel to touch his own lips with the glowing stone taken from the heart of the altar fire. As for Jeremiah, no one had ever heard him say much about his own call.¹ It had come to him while he was still a youth. Ezekiel remembered how he had spoken of his sense of nervousness and timidity at the prospect of being a prophet. "So like my own," Ezekiel had said to himself. But something had happened which Jeremiah could only describe as having his mouth touched by Jahve's own hand. That was more than being approached by one of the seraphim, like Isaiah. After such an experience the most timid would surely be able to speak or write. "If I were bidden to write the words on a roll after that," thought Ezekiel, "no Jehoiakim should ever be able to destroy what was written."

Such were the thoughts over which he brooded, now sitting in his own house, now walking beside the canals which threaded the interminable plain. One afternoon, towards evening, as he walked, toiling with the old weight of questions and cares, like Bunyan's Christian beneath his burden, he saw gathering in the West an immense storm-cloud,² like some ponderous temple of vapour which the setting sun had built for itself. As he watched it, its appearance grew more remarkable. The cloud seemed to be composed of concentric circles, around and within which the lightning revolved and flashed, like glowing wheels of fire.³ Then, as his eyes were riveted upon the phenomenon, he saw what it really was. It was no mere cloud. It was a mystical chariot. Supporting it were strange flying creatures, with the heads of an ox, a man, a lion, an eagle. The wheels, which he could now

¹ Jeremiah 14-10.

² Ezekiel 14.

³ Ezekiel 15.

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see were double, revolved at each corner of the chariot between them; above the wheels, and carried by them with unimaginable rapidity, was a platform, and on the platform a throne, azure like that of the deep clear space of sky he had noticed beside the cloud a few moments before. Seated on the ~~the~~ throne was the occupant of the chariot, clothed in the flames of a thousand lightnings. And the overwhelming radiance was—he needed no one to tell him—Jahve's glory.

He fell to the ground as if dead. The reader of the wonderfully vivid account which Ezekiel has left of this overmastering experience thinks naturally of a trance; he remembers the story of Moses who, gazing at the bramble bush aflame, as it seemed in the light of the Arabian sun, suddenly heard Jahve speaking to him from its centre¹; or of Paul, flung into the illumination of the subconscious state by the blinding mid-day glare on the Damascus road.²

How a calm-blooded and critical spectator might have described any of these events we cannot of course conjecture. We do not know whether Ezekiel's own story was written down at the time or long after. Perhaps as he went over it later on in his mind, he unconsciously worked out some of the details in accordance with what was to come to him afterwards, just as Paul, in one of his accounts of the turning point in his own life, quotes words as heard from Jesus at the time which would appear to have been suggested by subsequent discoveries.³ But the details of Ezekiel's narrative carry with them their own psychological justification. He sees both front and back at the same time, as the dreamer so

¹ Exodus 32⁴.

² Acts 9^{3,4}, 22⁶⁻⁹, 26^{13,14}.

³ Acts 26^{17,18}.

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often sees them. Rules of perspective and solidity have no existence for him. And the elements of his vision, as is common even with the dreams of ordinary persons, recall what must have been in his mind already.

Exponents of what is now known as psychoanalysis have cast fresh light on the subject of dreams. Dreams, as they urge, not only revive the past impressions of our waking life; they weave into their bizarre structure the half unconscious and "repressed" desires, hopes and fears of our inner life. They may thus be unique means of revealing ourselves to ourselves as well as to the skilled observer. Desires and fears certainly dwell near together.¹ Ezekiel may well have felt, at the same time, both desire and fear for this calling of the prophet. He dreaded it while he longed for it. Upon a high-spirited youth, the thought of a solemn duty will always have this double effect.

And dreams, we are informed, are "symbolic." They have a language of their own, which needs interpretation. They work by means of figures. For instance, a king is said to stand for a parent; a tree may stand for some strong personal influence upon our own lives, which we may value, or suspect, or both; fat and lean cattle, as in Pharaoh's well-known dream, may represent the different aspects of the dreamer's ideas about himself. All the Hebrew's thoughts about Jahve were necessarily symbolic. Such symbolism had become almost traditional. Theophanies had constantly been accompanied by fire, as was Ezekiel's²; the

¹ See Freud, "The Interpretation of Dreams," trans. A. A. Brill; Jung, "Collected Papers on Analytical Psychology;" Bradby, "Psycho-Analysis."

² Exodus 33; Judges 6²¹; 1 Kings 18³⁸.

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seraphim of Isaiah's vision had each possessed six wings¹; Moses, Nadab, and Abihu, according to the ~~the~~ old account, saw under the feet of the God of Israel a paved work of sapphire stone²; and what scholarly lover of old Hebrew literature could forget David's lines about Jahve who rode upon a cherub and did fly?³

Explain it how we will, however, the vision of Ezekiel was no ordinary dream. It did not occur in normal sleep. He was plunged into it in a moment of intense wakefulness and interest. And it did not fade with the period of waiting. Sight was immediately succeeded by hearing. It was the very message which had come to Jeremiah, but more elaborate. "They are shameless in their disobedience; but you must not be afraid of them. I have commissioned you to them. They will not listen. But what I say, you must speak."⁴ In this fashion, Ezekiel, like the other great prophets, learns his vocation, to take up his cross, priding himself on what all men despised, and to become dead to the world, with all its convictions, prizes and threats.⁵ What a strange fulfilment of the mingled hopes and forebodings that had preceded. And in the midst of the speaker's words, Ezekiel was conscious of a roll; not, however, like Jeremiah, to write, but to taste and devour.⁶

The chariot moved once more, and the vision passed. Later, Ezekiel found himself at home again, stunned and overwhelmed, unable to speak. The breath of Jahve, he said, had lifted him up, and conveyed him back from the spot.⁷ Henceforth he feels himself to be nothing but Jahve's

¹ Isaiah 62.

² Exodus 24¹⁰.

³ Psalm 18¹⁰.

⁴ Ezekiel 2.

⁵ cf. Matt. 49, 16²⁴; Gal. 6¹⁴; Col. 2²⁰.

⁶ Ezekiel 29.

⁷ Ezekiel 3¹⁴.

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mouthpiece. He has no word of his own. Subsequently he describes what he sees,¹ but never what he says or thinks, save for the briefest of incidental expostulations. Every address, studied or passionate, retrospective or prophetic, is simply and literally composed of what Jahve's word has said to him. As if to emphasise this complex and tool-like subordination, Ezekiel constantly hears the divine self-ratification, "I am Jahve,"² while he is himself regularly addressed not by name, but merely as "son of man."³

Even what he sees is the direct result of the hand of Jahve upon him. This is the expression with which he introduces the account of every one of his visions, from the first to the last and most elaborate of all.⁴ Every other experience, notably the curious "dumbness" that fell upon him, is attributed to the immediate operation of Jahve or of Jahve's breath or "spirit." Every event of his life, in fact, was now regarded and interpreted as Jahve's doing, just as Hosea had interpreted his own tragic marriage as obedience to a categorical order from Jahve, or (shall we add ?) as Samuel attributed his conviction "*Amalek delenda est*" to Jahve's inspiration.⁵

For a whole week the vision left Ezekiel paralysed and wretched. Then a fresh "word" came to him, substantiating what had gone before.⁶ He was to be a "watchman," warning the wicked, and responsible for them to Jahve. Like other

¹ Even when he describes his trances, his language is precise and correct; very different from the uncouthness which meets us in parts of the Apocalypse. But see page 111.

² Fifty-six times in all.

³ One hundred and sixteen times in all; cf. C.B. pp. 63f.

⁴ Ezekiel 13, 40¹.

⁵ Hosea 1², 3¹; 1 Samuel 15^{2,3}.

⁶ Ezekiel 3¹⁶.

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conceptions this view of himself as a watchman reappears later,¹ but it is important enough to make us pause for a moment at this point. Although Ezekiel's work for some years as yet was to be destructive rather than the reverse, he is here stating a principle that is at once positive and novel. The duty of a watchman implies a regularity and continuity which was foreign to the activity of the older prophet. The watchman cannot, like Elijah or Amos, suddenly appear and as suddenly disappear from the scene of his labour. His warnings, to be effective, cannot be timed by the spontaneous impulses to speech of which he may be conscious, but by the danger or sin of those for whom he is responsible. The prophet is always turning into the pastor.

It does not appear that in the coming days Ezekiel completely fulfilled the part thus assigned to him. He was too dependent on the afflatus of the moment. But that his companions learnt to expect from him something of this pastoral oversight is clear from the references he makes subsequently to their visits to him.² The full import of this rôle has hardly been appreciated even yet. What Ezekiel is led to contemplate, and what he had doubtless pondered over in the previous years, is a definite moral and religious authority, guarding against every tendency to lower the ethical standard of society and prompt to demand allegiance to its highest ideals. The Christian Church has never been wholly unmindful of this duty. But her spokesmen have for the most been content with what Ezekiel himself did on a later occasion,³ laying stress upon a certain number of vices—not always those to

¹ Ezekiel 33².

² Ezekiel 8¹, 14¹.

³ Ezekiel 18^{6ff.}

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which their hearers were most tempted—but passing over others at once more subtle and more far-reaching in their effects.

The great peril of the watchman is the complacency which may leave his hearers to

“Compound for sins they are inclined to
By damning those they have no mind to.”

No service that the Church could render to society to-day is more needed, nothing could be more effectual, than a thorough-going and authoritative criticism of contemporary standards of conduct, which would make life in religious circles as uncomfortable for the profiteer and the sweater as for the adulterer, and which would force greed and avarice to appear as discreditable as gambling and larceny.

Ezekiel, however, goes still further. If he does not do his duty he himself is to share the fate of the sinners. “His blood,” says Jahve, “will I require at thy hand.” This opens up a large and solemn prospect. The Church might well shrink from such a responsibility. It is not easy to warn those who are in high places, either in society or in the counsels of a particular church. But Ezekiel, for all his individualism, sees that sin is not a matter of the individual alone. To gloss over selfishness and pride, to repeat the Ten Commandments but forget the warnings of the Sermon on the Mount, brings the preacher into the peril that threatens the Pharisee or the rich man sitting beneath him.

No sooner had this added burden been laid upon him, than the vision of a week ago returned, and left him in a condition that he could only describe as “dumb.”¹ Except for the direct communi-

¹ Ezekiel 3²⁶ C.B.

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cations of Jahve, he had now nothing to say to his neighbours. Conversation, discussion, and even criticism and reproof, were at an end. From now on, as we should express it, Ezekiel's nervousness reached the climax which was its own defeat. He was persuaded that he could not speak unless some overmastering impulse swooped down on him; and then he was irresistible. As he described it, until the ban of silence should be removed, he was nothing but Jahve's chosen means of expression.

He was now launched upon his new career; and for a whole year his messages were devoted to one single subject, the certainty of the city's destruction. He had foreseen its necessity before. He had felt that nothing else could liberate Jahve's further designs. Now it occupied him like a horror. It prevented him from looking beyond. His one desire was to bring home the coming crash to the thought of his fellow-exiles. He could not be content with mere prediction. He must force his own certainty on their minds by grotesque dumb-show, exhibited, and then explained. His neighbours watched him making a little toy-plan of the siege which was to herald the city's doom;¹ they saw him lying day after day for over a year on one side of his body, and then for two months more on the other, to symbolise the wickedness of the two Hebrew kingdoms;² and they marked with horror how he ate bread cooked in the filthiest fashion (save that one loathsome expedient he could not bring himself to adopt), to suggest the rigours of the defenders' hunger.³ He cut off his own hair and beard with a sword, carefully divided it, as he relates, into three parts of equal weight, though we

¹ Ezekiel 4¹.

² Ezekiel 4⁴⁻⁸ C.B.

³ Ezekiel 4⁹⁻¹⁷.

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may wonder where hair is weighed save in a dreamer's consciousness ; scatters one portion to the wind, conceals another in his robe, and flings the third into the fire, to portend the three dreadful fates of pestilence, murder and dispersion.¹

Then the torrent of denunciation bursts forth.² Disobedience, idolatry and pollution have roused the fury of Jahve ; the city will be destroyed, and the mountains of Israel, the scenes of indescribable abominations, will be desolate. "*Fert impetus ipse volantem.*" As his thought concentrates on these terrors, his language grows more excited, and he describes the inevitable end in the tones of one who is gazing horror-stricken at the crash of a fair yet polluted civilisation before the onset of the vilest barbarism. There is little of actual accusation. And only once does he hint at the possibility of restoration.³ That hint is almost more sombre than silence itself. Like Dante and Carlyle, he feels the lash of the world's wickedness stinging him into fury. Dumbness was doubly terrible when broken by such divine messages as this.

Ezekiel's mind, however, was far too active to remain in this condition of vague and brooding horror. A certain acquiescence in vagueness, a love of somewhat large and misty effects is discernible in nearly all the Hebrew imaginative productions. There is little of clear-cut description in Hebrew poetry. With the delicate and accurate observation, either of individual character in our own novelists, or of the natural world in our poets, the ancient Hebrews would have had little sympathy or understanding. Ezekiel was different. In this respect at least, his mind was essentially

¹ Ezekiel 5.

² Ezekiel 6, 7.

³ Ezekiel 6⁸⁻¹⁰.

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modern. He was the solitary realist of Hebrew literature. And in the first year of his prophetic activity, he was constantly dwelling on the actual scenes of shame and violence and debauchery in the ill-fated yet still beloved city. He could not express the pictures which moved before his inner vision. His dumbness prevented this effectually. But, a year after his first trance, he experienced a second.

He was sitting in his own house. Some of the more influential men among the neighbours were with him. He was not an unimportant person socially. The leaders of the community were accustomed to discuss things in his presence; and it was always possible that he might have some word from Jahve to give them. Suddenly he was aware of a mysterious form like that which he had seen a year ago; and then he found himself gazing at a great pole, the symbol and centre of idolatrous worship, set up, where long previously Josiah had cut such poles down, in the Temple court. Next he found himself breaking into a chamber of the Temple, and watching a dumb ceremony of animal worship carried out by seventy prominent men; he recognised their leader at once. Then the scene changed; he saw a company of women in an open court, lamenting the Syrian deity Tammuz. Lastly, in the most sacred spot of all, twenty-five men (here, too, he is precise as to the actual number) were worshipping the sun.¹

Was this a case of clairvoyance or telepathy? Very probably. But then the dream consciousness supervened.² He heard a dread proclamation of vengeance, and then saw six men, each armed with a fatal weapon, and accompanied by a secretary or

¹ Ezekiel 8.

² Ezekiel 9.

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recorder. As the divine figure rose from the cherubs in the Holy Place of the Temple, clearly visible to the dreamer, though he himself was standing outside, these six men went from the Temple, through the city, killing every soul they found. One cry of agonised expostulation escaped Ezekiel; he was immediately rebuked,¹ and the slaughter was completed.

But the vision was not over. Already it had linked itself with the vision of a year previous. And although the waking consciousness was dulled and the neighbours sitting with him and staring at his trance were forgotten, his mind was still working according to its own deep laws. For Ezekiel, the culminating horror had not yet been reached. There was something worse than massacre. And this something was bound to come, just as some horror, suggested in the earlier stages of a terrible dream, approaches later, as it were, on the feet of destiny.

From the heaps of the corpses, men, women and little children, fallen together in ghastly confusion, Ezekiel looked up to see the mystic chariot, the sapphire and the wheels. And now, instead of the winged animals, he sees cherubs, heavenly counterparts of the cherubs on which he had been looking in the Temple's inner shrine.² The recorder approaches the chariot. The cherubs now are seen to have human heads under their wings. A hand puts fire into the hands of the recorder, and he flings it over the city. Then the whole chariot rises, as the divine presence places itself thereon. It is seen at the eastern gate of the temple, opposite to the shrine, and then slowly fades.

¹ Ezekiel 10¹ C.B.

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The waking consciousness begins to supervene. Ezekiel knows it is a vision, but he is sure of what he has seen, none the less.¹ His phrases are tantalisingly rapid and broken—how could they be anything else? But there is no more striking description of a theophany in Hebrew, and therefore in the world's literature; and, as we piece it together, we feel, as Ezekiel himself felt most prominently, the irresistible advance of the chariot and the awful purpose of its rider.

Even now, the experience was not at an end. His underlying sense of the infatuation of the remnant in the city was too deep. After an interval, Ezekiel finds himself standing at the eastern gate, where the chariot had just faded from his sight.² Here he now sees the group of twenty-five men again. They are talking, with utterly ill-founded confidence, of their plans for the city's defence. "The city," said they with unconscious dramatic irony, "is the cauldron, we are the meat within it."³ To the visionary it is no obstacle that all the inhabitants of the city had been previously killed. Conscious of a sudden rush of inspiration, he begins to address them in burning words. At the close, he sees in terror that one of their leaders falls dead.⁴ If this, too, is not a case of telepathy, it is curiously suggestive of it. But deeper than his terror lies his indignation at the contempt of this remnant for the exiles. Whatever happens to the doomed men in Jerusalem, the exiles will be gathered and brought back.⁵ It is characteristic of Ezekiel that

¹ Ezekiel 10²⁰.

² Ezekiel 11.

³ Ezekiel 11³. The expression is referred to again in chap. 24^{3,6}. See p. 126.

⁴ Ezekiel 11¹³; cf. Jeremiah 28¹⁷.

⁵ Ezekiel 11^{16ff.}

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this, his first elaborated promise of restoration, anticipating as it does much of the actual language of his later predictions, should appear in such a context. Next, he is conscious of the chariot once more. He does not see it now in all its enthralling details: what he does see is more appalling. It rises again, leaves the temple and the city, crosses the Valley of the Kidron to the east, and takes its stand on the Mount of Olives, where another and greater Jew beheld the city and wept over it.

✕ Jerusalem is now finally desolate. Ezekiel came to himself and tremblingly and exhaustedly related his vision to his friends. It was to no purpose. They were blind. Ezekiel was no more able to make them understand than Isaiah or Jeremiah. But he could not be satisfied with their insensate dullness of comprehension. No further vision came. Instead, an overpowering impulse of another kind. If he could not impress them through their imagination, he would do so through their sight. Accordingly, they watched him carrying out a pathetic mimicry of the actions of flight from a besieged city.¹ He was not simply thinking of them. The conception of the inevitable siege had laid hold of him. Imagination forced itself into action. He dug a hole in the wall of his house; part of his household furniture he dragged out by day, part after dark. Later, he acted another sinister play. He rations himself, both for food and drink, as men must do during a siege.² His neighbours watch him again. But his thoughts are back at Jerusalem. Running in his mind are the proud words which the survivors' communications have brought to his ears, "The end is not yet," they

¹ Ezekiel 12^{iff.}

² Ezekiel 12^{7ff.}; cf. Lam. 5⁴.

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had told the exiles ; “ we can hold out indefinitely ; your prophet speaks of a very distant future.”¹

He can do no more. His visions had for the time drained his strength. His mimicry could not influence those who most terribly needed its lessons. He answers their confidence with brief stern words, but even if his message reaches them, what will it accomplish ? The first months of his activity thus left him, as it seemed, plunged in failure. He could not dissipate the complacency of the remnant in the city nor even move his own hearers. They were a “ rebellious house,” “ of an hard forehead and of a stiff heart.”² The tragedy of Jeremiah was already his own.

✓ But though for a time his strength might fail, his conviction and his purpose were unaltered. For a whole year, the breath of Jahve had dominated him. Every movement of his mind was gathered up into the tide of that great spirit. He had spoken nothing of his own. Whether others listened or refused, his course was clear. The hesitations of the past were over. As he was ordered so he acted and spoke. Perfect obedience is perfect freedom.

¹ Ezekiel 12^{21ff.} Interesting illustrations of the idolatrous practices of these men and women in the temple at Jerusalem will be found in Jeremiah, *The O.T. in Light of Ancient East*, Vol. ii., pp. 288ff.

² Ezekiel 2⁶, 37.

CHAPTER VII

THE GREAT INDICTMENT

EZEKIEL is not one of those writers who lets us into the secrets of his brain—"all his hourly varied anodynes." That he had long periods of brooding is certain; whole battalions of jostling thoughts marched confusedly through his mind. But they never found utterance. It was his temperament to "keep them in smother," as Bacon put it, till they reached a point of absolute clearness. He knew that if he waited long enough, he would arrive at such a point. Then, indeed, the thought seemed to pass out of his control altogether. It was not his at all. It rose up before him from somewhere outside, with the dazzling magnificence of the word of Jahve. Such a moment always brought dumbness to an end, and his speech became the speech that men will not allow to perish.

If we are to understand these moments of inspiration, however, we must remember that very much passed between them. Ezekiel's own writings give us the impression of a picture of a chain of Alpine summits, cut sharply against a brilliantly blue sky, while below all lies hidden in the mist. But the peaks are unintelligible apart from the silent forces that work beneath them in mist and shadow, the white threads of the

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torrents twisting through the valleys far below, and the dumb resistance of the foot-hills and the mountain buttresses. There is nothing capricious about an Alpine mountain chain, and there was nothing capricious about Ezekiel's rugged brilliance. On the contrary, there is no prophet whose inner thoughts we can trace with such detail and confidence.

✓ More than a year had now passed since his call. It was a year marked by strong and exhausting physical excitement and visions, clairvoyance, trances, the bodily weariness induced by prolonged and abnormal postures, and, behind all, the intense consciousness of an absolutely engrossing and relentless duty laid upon him, and of the inevitable ruin of the city which he loved and condemned with equal intensity.

Such a condition, if prolonged further, would have worn out the prophet's strength. Through the merciful law of psychological reaction, it did not continue. It brought its own relief. Little by little, Ezekiel passed from the emotional to the intellectual. The city, he knew, would fall. The knowledge ceased to excite him as violently as when it had first dawned upon him. He now had leisure to think over the necessity and to analyse the reasons for its fate.

This impulse to analysis was strengthened by his intercourse, never really broken off, with his neighbours. Listening to his outbursts of horror, they had naturally asked, "Why should it all come on us? Are we worse than those who went before us?" And they would quote other prophecies, of which there were not a few, to the effect that the case of the city was not so hopeless after

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all; Jahve would still protect His own. What impiety to refuse to believe this.¹

X Another and a sterner nature might have brushed all these questions aside with contempt. Ezekiel was far too sensitive to do this. He could never bring himself to neglect what others were saying or thinking.² In some moments, when the certainty was far off, and his dumbness was lying heavy on him, he almost wondered whether they were not right. But if they were wrong, as at bottom he knew they must be, how could he answer and convince them? He was thus forced to turn his thoughts to the interpretation of the nation's guilt and the consequent exposition of his own deep-rooted belief in individual responsibility. In the first, he had Hosea and Jeremiah as leaders; but he felt that they had not, so to speak, worked out their subject. In the second, he stood almost alone. Prophets and people alike had been accustomed to regard the whole nation, past and present, as a single moral personality, a fit and natural subject for both reward and penalty. Only when people began to ask, "Why should we suffer, when our ancestors did not?" were they ready to understand the epoch-making individualism of the prophet's daring thought.³

It is true that these two convictions, the nation's guilt, and the individual's responsibility, are by no means consistent. If the individual is answerable for all he does and for nothing else, how can a whole nation be spoken of as guilty at all? Is the nation anything but an accidental assemblage of inde-

¹ Isaiah 37^{22,31}; Jeremiah 28², 29⁸, and the attitude of the prophets, with the priests, in 26^{8ff.}

² Ezekiel 11^{3,15}, 12²², 13¹⁰, 18², 20^{32,49}, 24¹⁹, 36¹³.

³ See C.B. pp. 20, 69, 154.

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pendent individuals? But Ezekiel was a pioneer; and when an engineer is rough-hewing the road for us, levelling the hills and filling up the hollows, we must not blame him if he has no time to think about consistency. There will be plenty of opportunity, later on, to make all smooth and regular, with foot-paths, gutters and parapets.

With the current of his mental life thus drained off into intellectual channels, the first problem he had to grapple with was that of the rival prophets, both men and women. False prophets had been the bane of genuine prophecy, from Elijah to Jeremiah.¹ Why should they be wrong and Ezekiel himself right? Why was Zedekiah the son of Chenaanah wrong when, in the face of Micaiah's silent protest, he cried out to Ahab, "Go up to Ramoth Gilead and prosper, for Jahve shall deliver it into thine hand?"² Was there any touchstone save the actual event? To find such a touchstone had been too much for Ezekiel's predecessors;³ but the answer came to him, and came with such clearness that it not only lifted his dumbness for the time, but almost made him overlook its own importance in his eagerness to enforce the consequences of his discovery.

They prophesied, in fact, "out of their own heart";⁴ in accordance, that is, with their own interest and desires; they did not make up the "fence for the house of Israel"; and there was no insistence on the unchanging distinction between right and wrong by which alone a nation can be

¹ 1 Kings 18²²: Jeremiah 23³¹.

² 1 Kings 22¹⁷; and see Jeremiah 27¹⁴, 28³.

³ cf. Jeremiah 23^{32ff}; and see Deut. 13¹⁻⁵, 18²⁰⁻²².

⁴ Ezekiel 13²⁵, 22^{25, 28ff}; Jeremiah 29²⁴⁻³³.

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protected. Their wall of unfounded confidence, where the wish was father to the thought, was built of "untempered mortar," and would come down at the first blow. Possibly they had deceived themselves before they had deceived others. There is no such false counsellor as self-interest. Ezekiel reminds us of Plato's brilliant description of the evil counsellors of the young Demos.¹ And what an "acid test" is his principle for the perplexities of our own day. The air is full of prophecies, as in the sixth century; the predictions begotten by self-interest upon immoral credulity are seduction² as guilty as that of the female "pillow-makers" of Jerusalem.³

But the guilt of the false prophet did not exhaust the matter. Demand creates supply; and those who blame the "untempered mortar" of the halfpenny press must also blame those who ask for such walls to be built around them. This flashed across Ezekiel one day when his friends came to consult him instead of his rivals. They had come to ask, he felt, about themselves;⁴ they had taken, as he quaintly and vigorously put it, their idols into their own hearts. They would have to answer for this themselves. No one else would be able to save them. And so, by rapid association of ideas, Ezekiel passed to his first definite and systematic assertion of his doctrine of responsibility (not yet quite conscious of itself).⁵

There is one curious point in the discourse on individual responsibility which must not be passed

¹ *Rep.* vi. 492.

² Ezekiel 13¹⁰.

³ Ezekiel 13¹⁸, C.B.; see also Frazer, J. G., "Folk Lore in Old Testament," Vol. ii., p. 510.

⁴ Ezekiel 14⁷.

⁵ Ezekiel 14^{12ff}; cf 3^{18ff} and C.B. pp. 20f.

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over. The same question was prominently raised in the well-known Babylonian version of the Flood story, contained in the epic of Gilgamesh. En-lil, the supreme god and the author of the flood is there remonstrated with for causing a calamity that destroys good and bad alike. Why not be content, he is asked, with simply diminishing mankind by wild beasts, famine or plague? Ezekiel, discussing the same question, does not mention the flood; but that it was in his mind seems clear from his mention of Noah, as one of the righteous men who would be unable to deliver the wicked. He is free from the inconsistency of the Babylonian document which goes on to suggest, as alternatives, calamities which would be no more successful than the flood itself in distinguishing between the moral character of the victims; but he mentions all the three which occurred to the Babylonian writer, adding, quite naturally, the scourge of war.

✓ Is this a piece of plagiarism? The suggestion is plausible, but hardly convincing. As we have seen, Ezekiel's Babylonian surroundings influenced neither his thought nor his language. He, like his friends, was too much engrossed by his memories and his hopes. And this particular problem of the individual rose out of the special conditions of his time and his community. But the resemblance between his great discourse and the Babylonian document is too close to be accidental. We can only conclude that he had previously heard or read it, interested as he might well be in finding a parallel to the tale he had learnt in his boyhood, and that it sank into, or, as we can so often say of matters to which we give a passing attention, *through* his memory. Subsequently, when he had to deal

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carefully with the question which had then been merely suggested to him, it was revived by one of those intricate processes of association familiar to psychologists. The result was that his own development of the subject was influenced by a heathen author, to whom, consciously, he would have refused any attention. Environment is like nature. You may drive it out with a pitchfork; it will return. Before and after Ezekiel, the Hebrews neglected this rough weapon oftener than they used it. Ezekiel hardly ever allowed it out of his hand. But occasionally, as here, environment took its revenge.¹

By another quick transition, the old horror of the coming ruin of the land rises before him again. The old *régime* is as useless as an armful of old vine branches, good for nothing but the flames.² The horror has taken too deep a hold on his mind not to find expression at every fresh opportunity. But a stream of thought was now to play on it. Accordingly, his thoughts turned back to the whole past history of his country. It is a strange and repellent interpretation that he gives. We must not blame him for the absence of the historian's habit of mind. That habit was an unknown thing in his time. He lived two centuries before Thucydides; and Thucydides himself has been accused of writing history like a tragedian.³ But Ezekiel had read the surviving fragments of Hosea; he had listened to Jeremiah; and he had thus become familiar with the thought of his country as the bride of Jahve and as a scandalously unfaithful bride. This gave him at last the form and mould for the scathing condemnation of the past which was now uppermost in his mind. As

¹ Gilg. Epic, xi. 180-194. See L. W. King, *Schweich Lectures*, 1918, pp. 132ff.

² Ezekiel 15².

³ L. C. Cornford, "*Thucydides Mythistoricus*."

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imaginative as he was sensitive, Ezekiel could never refrain from following out an image or a symbol.¹ His imagination fastened on the elements of the picture provided for him ; and he worked it out with characteristic and almost venomous realism, and with burning moral indignation, till he had transformed it as Shakespeare transformed the old sagas of Lear and Macbeth. The virgin daughter of Israel is changed into a very monster of sensuality, whose nature can only be described by the coarsest terms. At last, in the white heat of his anger, symbol and reality are fused, and metaphor and literal statement pass into one.

It is not the utterance of a historian ; neither does it suggest materials for the ordered plans of an architect of reconstruction. It breathes the wild zeal of a reformer who can see nothing good in the evil past, like the Puritan who cannot believe that the Catholic Church was ever anything better than a curse to mankind, or the socialist who sees in capitalism the root of all the miseries of the present time. Ezekiel knew little, and cared less, for that spontaneous and genial loyalty in the minds of the old Hebrew peasant warriors to all that they knew of Jahve's will, which figures so largely and attractively in the "prophetic" narratives of Israel's past. If there were great and good men in previous ages, their solitary position simply emphasised the rebelliousness of the nation as a whole. But he often spoke as if there had been none.² His verdict on his country was that which Stephen uttered later, before a protesting and angry crowd. But Stephen had no such command of language, and no such reservoirs of emotion, as Ezekiel. Indeed, Ezekiel

¹ Ezekiel 2⁶, 3⁹, 6⁵, 17¹⁻¹⁰, 22²⁰, 27, 30²¹, 24, 33¹⁷, 34¹².

² Ezekiel 14¹⁴, 22³⁰.

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reminds us strangely of Hamlet in his fearful outburst to his mother on the discovery of her incestuous guilt.¹

Such being the case, we must not look for the tenderness of Hosea in the unsparing denunciations of Ezekiel. He had seen too clearly the forces of hell at their foul work. As well expect in the tragic visions of Latzko or the drab misery of Tchekoff the romantic sense of the beauty of suffering and the pitifulness of sin which lights up the sombre pages of Dostoieffsky.

But let us not too hastily blame Ezekiel. He exaggerated. All men exaggerate when they are as terribly in earnest as he was. But at least he saw the infinite danger of "coquetting" (he would have condemned the word as criminally mild) with worldly diplomacy and brutal foreign powers. He knew well that a nation is only safe if it "makes its moral being its prime care." He saw the real wickedness of a policy of entangling alliances where principle is sacrificed to the success of an ingenious and secret bargain. And though at this period his thoughts were still far from reconstruction, no one who has ever thought of reconstructing a world or a policy can venture to despise the truths which were soon to burn in the flames that devoured the stones of Zion. But this is not the whole matter. Indeed, the most surprising part of the composition is its conclusion. For the storm-wracked night begins to depart, and the light of dawn is at hand. It is a grey and sombre dawn. But it rises with the promise of a new world. It is a dawn of forgiveness.

As Ezekiel well knew, his predecessors had spoken of Jahve's forgiveness and restoration of His people.

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But they had failed to satisfy him. Their idea of forgiveness, as Schelling says of Hegel's Absolute, was "fired out of a pistol." It had no connection with the sin it was to blot out.¹ Ezekiel could sympathise with this as little as he could sympathise with a Messiah who, like a *deus ex machina*, should suddenly appear, meteor-like, to set right a disordered nation. How could Jahve forgive unless the people were fit to be forgiven? And what could make them fit? No one had suggested an answer to this question. No one even seemed to suspect that an answer was necessary. And yet, to Ezekiel's psychology, the answer was there. And, once found, he never lost sight of it. We may not agree with his view. Yet no one who would understand the problem of moral reconstruction, and more particularly the great and central reconstructive process of the Atonement, can afford to pass it by.

"O Hamlet, thou hast torn my heart in twain," cried Queen Gertrude. "O throw away the worser part of it," was her son's reply, "and live the purer with the better part." But how does one throw away half one's heart? By seeing clearly the sin, and then, by a necessary consequence, loathing it.² Ingratitude and rebellion are followed by the ruin they deserve, and produce; but when that ruin is in turn followed by a renewal of former signs of goodness, sin is no longer feared or even regretted; it is hated. Hatred means repudiation; repudiation brings the attitude that can receive forgiveness. And with forgiveness the evil past is destroyed.

¹ Amos 9¹¹; Hosea 3⁵, 14⁵; Isaiah 11¹⁻⁹, 12, 31⁴, 32^{1,2}; Micah 4⁴, 5^{3ff}; Jeremiah 23¹⁻⁸, 30^{16,22}, 31^{1-14,31}.

² Ezekiel 16⁶¹.

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The entail is cut off. The sinner can make a fresh start. The ground is at last clear. Ezekiel does not allow us to forget Hosea. But if, unlike Hosea, he refuses to leave one detail of the woman's shame without dragging it beneath the searchlight, he gives us, not a hint, but a reasoned account of her restoration. Ezekiel never saw the cross rising above the fiery chariot of his trance. But he was the only one of the Hebrew seers who knew what was that tremendous task which the cross and the cross alone could accomplish.

As yet, the dawn had not overspread the sky. Its light was not clearly seen for years afterwards. But it had been glimpsed and recognised as genuine. With Ezekiel, to recognise a truth was not to search it at once to its depths. He would recur to it again and again, as we shall see, each time with a more discerning eye; or, as he would say, a more open ear, hearing from Jahve at last the full and final expression of the great word that should make all things new.

Once more, after this mighty effort, came the reaction. For the time, he had cut himself loose from his surroundings, deaf as well as dumb to his friends in exile. Now he found himself listening again to their talk, and sharing their thought. The more he had to harden his face against their faces,¹ the more the innate sense of sociability drew him into their converse. For a time, his approaches to certainty and the reception of Jahve's word were governed by events and common talk.

All through Zedekiah's reign, the politicians left in Jerusalem had been hatching plots against their suzerain in Babylon. Egypt, which had so often

¹ Ezekiel 3⁸.

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failed them, might still in the eleventh hour prove their salvation. The prospects of these designs were eagerly canvassed among the exiles. Contemptuous as was their attitude to the "rump" in Jerusalem, a set-back to Babylonian power there would make a great difference, for good or evil, to their own situation. Ezekiel could not join in their discussions. He was still "dumb." But one day he startled them all with an enigmatic account of the situation as he saw it.¹ An eagle, a cedar twig, a low spreading vine, a second eagle; strange and to us quite inartistic imagery; but it brushed through the diplomatic sophistries of his hearers, and told them bluntly that such plots against Babylon meant the breaking of sworn agreements, rebellion against Jahve as well as treason against Nebuchadnezzar, and that therefore they were doomed at last to failure, even though, in the dim future, another cedar twig should flourish in glory.

When they were not talking politics, the exiles turned to religion. It was the old complaint about the sour grapes that they voiced. "*Delicta majorum immeritus lues.*"² Jahve was unfair. Ezekiel had already met this accusation. Now he attacked it in greater detail, and this time purely from the standpoint of the individual.³ Fathers cannot save sons, neither can they ruin them. The past cannot obliterate the present. It is rather the present that for good or evil obliterates the past. Does Jahve delight in the sinner's death? asks the prophet. Conduct decides destiny, even as conduct may change from year to year, or from hour to hour.

¹ Ezekiel 17.

² Hor. Od. iii. 6. The whole ode will illustrate still better Ezekiel 16.

³ Ezekiel 18; cf. Jeremiah 187-11.

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This is more than individualism ; it is atomism. But without it there could have been no doctrine of moral responsibility, or of conversion. It was Ezekiel's unique skill to pick up the chance pebbles of conversation and form of them a foundation for the only Hebrew system of theology ever framed.

Behind all this talk was the constant sense of tragedy. And the whole tragedy of the nation seemed to be summed up in the fate of the two young kings, dethroned almost before they were crowned, Jehoahaz and Jehoiachin, one dragged to Egypt and the other to Babylon. Sternness was always blended in Ezekiel with sympathy ; and he produced an elegy, not specially remarkable for poetry, but full of deep feeling, both for the princes and for the country that produced and lost them.¹

To the exiles, this was a new and more human Ezekiel. But if they expected a change in his attitude they were mistaken. Just two years after his call, they had come to him with another question, when something in their words aroused him ; and the author of the plaintive lament over Jehoahaz burst into another fiery denunciation of the whole history of the past. There was no metaphor this time ; it was all one lurid story of self-pollution by wilful and repeated sin. And the conclusion was exactly the same as before ; restoration, acceptance by Jahve, self-loathing, and knowledge of Jahve by His people.²

This passionate declamation excited something of the old psychical disturbance. The prophet was suddenly aware of a visionary sword, brandished before him, to accomplish the end of the doomed city. Swept away by a wild torrent of feeling, he

¹ Ezekiel 19 ; contrast Jeremiah 22¹⁰⁻¹², 24-30.

² Ezekiel 20¹⁻⁴⁴.

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clutched a sword himself, leaping about and waving it to and fro,¹ with terrible and half incoherent cries of doom. Then he passed as quickly into a kind of trance,² and watched Nebuchadnezzar pausing in his punitive advance through Palestine at the cross roads and consulting the omens—should he attack Jerusalem first, or Ammon? His vision follows both the roads. At the end of one he sees Jerusalem, and cries out again on its guilt. At the end of the other are the barbarities of Ammon, and he seizes the sword again³ till the ecstasy gradually dies away, the sword is sheathed,⁴ and a partial coherence passes at last into silence.

With Ezekiel, excited declamation is always followed by reasoned accusation. As if to protect Jahve from a fresh attack by His critics, he now pronounces his judgment on the blood-stained city; every sin is described; every class arraigned. Indeed, in this passage we come upon what we may call Ezekiel's central indictment, and by the order in which he arranges his "counts" against Judah, he shows us unconsciously his system of values; contempt for the sanctity of the family, exploitation of the defenceless—the alien and the destitute; ritual carelessness, murder, heathen practices, greed and covetousness, commercial dishonesty and corruption. This is not the catalogue of a mere ritualist.⁵ They had spoken of the city as a caldron. It was to be a smelting furnace, where metals of every kind, all equally useless, were to be melted down into an indistinguishable mass.⁶

So judgment passed into condemnation; and the condemnation was again followed by judgment.

¹ Ezekiel 21³, C.B. ² Ezekiel 21¹⁸. ³ Ezekiel 21²⁸. ⁴ Ezekiel 21³⁰.

⁵ Ezekiel 22⁷⁻¹²; cf. 34²⁻⁶, and Jeremiah 5²⁶⁻²⁸. ⁶ Ezekiel 22^{17ff}; cf. 11³.

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The allegory of the unfaithful bride recurred ;¹ but now there were two women in the prophet's mind, to represent Israel and Judah. The new picture is even more elaborate in its realistic accumulation of revolting details, and this time there is no prediction of forgiveness, only of a fate in which all surrounding nations would visit on these two shameless women their infamies.

So ends the terrible series of prophecies. The actual fulfilment was not yet, for some months ; but the last word had now been said. Ezekiel could but wait until the sword he had beheld, "its handle towards his hand," was actually stretched over the proud city of David and Solomon.

¹ Ezekiel 23.

CHAPTER VIII

IDOLATRY

WE are now reaching the end of the second phase of Ezekiel's active career. For three years and a half he has been, so to speak, tracking out the various aspects of the nation's sin. In this process he has not yet completely found himself. This will be clear to the reader from the variety of the subjects of his impassioned discourses. Not till some years later was he able to concentrate on the great task of his life, the reconstruction of the temple and the city. So far, he is still the reformer, or rather, the iconoclast ; and he aims his shattering blows now in this direction, now in that.

Yet behind all his diverging attacks is one central object of abhorrence, the nation's sin itself. It was a cloud which hung before his vision with a black and terrible ugliness that never moved. And it was well for him that this was so. Otherwise his great and final achievement would have been impossible. There can be no reconstruction unless the attention is first closely fixed on that which has to be cleared away. The rubbish of the fallen buildings must be destroyed before the new foundations can be laid. The poisonous weeds of the jungle must be uprooted and burnt, or no garden flowers will ever delight the eye.

Here, then, let us pause and ask, In what did this national sin consist ? Most readers of the Old Testa-

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ment would answer at once, the sin of the ancient Hebrews was idolatry. Passages in support of this can be quoted from every period. Especially in the second half of Isaiah and several of the Psalms, idolatry is attacked with a brilliant vigour in which sarcasm is as conspicuous as loathing.¹ In an earlier age, Hosea anticipates the attack;² the histories of the divided kingdom constantly illuminate it; and Ezekiel himself, both in his visions and his set speeches, sees it clearly enough. The idols are not only worshipped, they are enshrined in the hearts of their worshippers.³ To what depths of fatuous iniquity had the nation sunk when once it forgot the second commandment?⁴

Idolatry, however, is more than the mere worshipping of idols. No one is blind or silly enough merely to bow down to wood and stone. Certainly no idolater would ever admit that he was doing nothing more than this. As far as the Hebrews were concerned, their writers supply abundant proofs that idolatry is a more complex phenomenon. Often the idols are representations of Jahve himself; and the sin consists in worshipping Jahve as He has chosen not to be worshipped, and not in deserting Him for some other god. Often, too, the worship of other gods is described, but without any reference to idols at all. Baal, importuned a whole summer's day on Mount Carmel by his despairing devotees, was exactly like Jahve in having no image, but needing only an altar and a sacrificial offering. But when Ezekiel speaks of the idols in Jerusalem, he does not laugh at them, as his successor could laugh at the

¹ Isaiah 40^{19ff}, 44^{9ff}, 46¹⁻⁷; Psalm 115^{4ff}, 135^{15ff}.

² Hosea 4¹¹, 8¹, 10⁵, 13².

³ Ezekiel 14³.

⁴ Romans 1²⁷.

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idols in Babylon; he obviously associates them with something despicable, cruel and unclean. At the same time, he does not always make it clear whether the idols were idols of Jahve or of some other deity. Very likely the worshipper was often quite puzzled to decide. Why should Jahve not be called Baal (master), or even Molech (king) ?

This is perplexing. Idolatrous worship, it seems, did not consist simply in the worship of idols. False gods could be worshipped without idols. Nor did it consist simply in worshipping false gods, since the worship of Jahve Himself might be idolatry. The truth is that idolatry is a matter not so much of the object as of the spirit of worship. The spirit of worship may be the same whether worship is directed to the "calves" representing Jahve at Bethel¹ or the hideous figurines recently discovered at Gezer and Taanach.

Is this a paradox ? All worship is in the last resort the expression of a prayer, a need. And of this prayer there always have been, and always will be, two-types. "Become, or do, what I would have thee"; and "Make me as thou wouldst have me." In the second consists true religion, to whatever strange or uncouth deity it is addressed: the first is the utterance of idolatry, even if it is flung down before one whom the worshipper imagines he is invoking in the name of Christ.

Israelite religion, like so much else connected with Israel, shows the general type of development "writ small" in one little human family. It began, as ethnic religions have usually begun, with the worship of a tribal god. The god's interest and those of his people were identical. And when you

¹ 1 Kings 12²⁸.

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have a proposition of identity, $A=B$, it makes all the difference whether the term on which you fix your mind is A or B. " $A=B$; we know what A is; therefore B must be the same thing." Or you may argue " $A=B$; B is obvious, so now we can understand A."

This is precisely what happened in the history of Israelite religion. On the one hand, perfectly honest Hebrews, influenced by that wide-spread habit of mind that we have come to call Prussian, argued that B, the nation's interest, was clearly victory, or a good harvest, or escape from an epidemic. If so, it must also be A, Jahve's interest; and the only thing to be done was to discover how, by prayers or sacrifices or strange new rites, to induce Jahve to achieve it. The consideration that Jahve ought not to need inducements to fulfil His own purposes did not apparently occur to them. Nor does it prevent the possibility of similar prayer among earnest religious people to-day. The real drawback was that attempts at this discovery of inducements might lead along many devious paths; it was as well to take no risks; plans tried by other tribes in order to set in motion their own sluggish deities might be imported; and then why not the deities themselves? What could be more natural than that in time of prosperity, when the continued favour of heaven is to be demanded, sumptuous ritual and rivers of sacrificial blood should be the marks of religion, while under the shadow of calamity and disaster, the dark ceremonies of the foreigner and his darker gods and goddesses should be tried? And if it should happen that when they had burned incense, for example, to the queen of heaven,¹ they were

¹ Jeremiah 7¹⁸, 44¹⁸.

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better off than after they had desisted, how resist the conclusion that it would be highly desirable to recommence the practice ?

Such is the pathway from religion to superstition. Once a man begins to pray, " my will be done, on earth and in heaven," he has started on the journey. The next step will be to try experiments in binding his god to answer his prayer. These experiments will doubtless be limited by his sense of humour (if he has one) or his conception of science ; but they will all be neither more nor less than superstition. Samson praying for revenge on his country's foes for his two eyes points the way to Jaazaniah and his resuscitated and atavistic totemism.¹

But there were some in Israel who made a different thing of the great proposition of all religion. " A, the will of Jahve, is clearly something great and good ; justice, purity, honesty, truth ; how could we put it at less than this ? Then B, my own interests, must be this also. Then justice, purity, honesty, truth, must be the things by which we live ; without them we shall perish." Worship thus entirely changes its character. " Make me as Thou wouldst have me. Thy will be done as in heaven so on earth." True, we may suspect self-interest even in such a prayer as this. " Make us just and honest, lest we perish miserably." But self-interest is not necessarily an evil ; and to identify self-interest with the interest of God leads on towards the heights of saintliness. " Whom have I in heaven but thee, and there is none other on earth that I desire beside thee ? " ² At all events, the man who has learnt to pray like this has a sovereign prophy-

¹ Judges 16²⁸ ; Ezekiel 8¹¹, 11¹.

² Ps. 73²⁵.

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lactic against superstition. No one ever swung Jaazaniah's censer in order to be enabled to pay his debts with a cheerful heart, or to escape the temptation to sweat his work-people.

The sterner Hebrews, however, said and knew nothing about superstition. The comparative study of religion, as we call it, would have seemed to them no better than sheer trafficking with impiety. They spoke of the downward path in religion simply as idolatry; and in the writings of a Jew of a far later age is a phrase which goes to the root of the whole consideration: "covetousness which is idolatry."¹ Idolatry and covetousness are simply one and the same thing.

Now this is precisely the point to which our investigation has been leading us. "Become, or do, what I desire." What is this but covetousness turned into an address to heaven? With Jaazaniah it meant swinging his censer to the animals painted on the chapel walls; with the mediæval Catholic it meant dedicating shrines and buying indulgences and bequeathing masses for his soul's repose; with "Christian" nations that go to war with one another it means solemn gatherings in cathedrals and prayers for the victory of our arms; and with most of us it means nothing else than the spirit which prompts us to think of the things we want and then to ask God to be kind enough to bestow them on us.

"Ye cannot worship God and Mammon."² Not in vain did Jesus, the world's supreme psychologist, contrast in these terms the true religion and idolatry. For in truth idolatry is not a snare confined to an age that has passed away. If mankind

¹ 1 John 5²¹.

² Matthew 6²⁴.

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were less fundamentally and incurably religious, we might congratulate ourselves on having escaped its perils. But there is just as much worship of Mammon, sincere and selfish, as in the rough centuries before Christ. Desire and greed are as strong and tyrannous. Covetousness is always with us to pull down religion from the sky, force it into the mire of idolatry. It flaunts itself before us, a very "abomination of desolation, standing where it ought not," where it has no right to be, in the very place of God. For God is the just and loving Father of all mankind, Who makes His sun to shine on the evil and the good, but Who hates the mean cleverness that pulls down its barns to build greater, and Who smiles at the folly that lays up its treasures where thieves break through and steal. An abomination of desolation indeed, venerated and obeyed as the one power which infidelity and scepticism can never question, and before which atheism itself bends down in awe; the parody and the shame of all religion.

The extirpation of idolatrous worship is the core of all reconstruction. Ezekiel saw this. He saw it long before he was certain as to the path of reconstruction itself. All the evils of the past were due to it. All the measures for the future must combine to make its recurrence impossible. He was a wise "master builder." True, he had the narrow views of his age and his calling. He did not suspect the full impressiveness of the identification between covetousness and idolatry which, as we now see, gives his polemic its abiding significance. The more he pondered over idolatry and its destruction, the more he thought of it as would a priest. Little by little he came to give less attention

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to the moral heinousness of the thing, and more to the debased ritual which was its accompaniment and stimulus. Let us once get rid of the ritual, he said to himself, and the thing itself will perish. Let us drive out of worship its expression by means of the forced and calculated expression of another mood, and the spirit thus expressed will disappear.

Perhaps his view is less narrow than we suppose. The religious reformer, to say nothing of the architect of reconstruction, must always be ready to look round for hints from the psychologist. Aristotle shared Ezekiel's combination of systematic analysis with sensitiveness to common ideas around him ; and he was wiser than many of his critics when he said that we become good by doing good things. The converse is equally true. It is of course specially true of children. Train children to avoid the acts which manifest passion and greed, by any system of educational taboos you like, and the impulses themselves will wither.

The truth is that no impulse can flourish when deprived of its appropriate expression. This is true also of grown men and women. We Protestants have become naturally but dangerously suspicious of ritual. Ritual, like habit, can be turned into an ally as well as a jailer. If few of us since the days of James¹ have troubled to think out the right ritual in which to embody Christian goodwill, that is not to say that the ritual is undiscoverable. We may wash the feet of the disciples without the solemn and revolting mummery of the *servus servorum Christi* in the Vatican. It may be that in the future we shall come to treat ritual with some of the respect which Ezekiel

¹ James 127.

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paid to it, later in his life, with whole-hearted confidence and devotion.

But these, the reader may suspect, are perilous speculations. Let us then turn to another thought that will already have entered his mind. In the dark pictures of Ezekiel, he will recollect, idolatry is always associated with sensualism. Its worshippers follow Comus more obviously than Mammon. And such, too, seems the dominating thought of Paul in the pregnant argument already noticed.¹ The reminder is just. As a matter of history, idolatry and sensualism have always walked together. Certainly they did so with the Hebrews. A hot-blooded and excitable race, the Hebrews found the traditional and popular festivals too great a temptation to be resisted. The exuberance of the harvest and vintage reacted at once on the passions of the men and women who were celebrating their gifts. No wonder that Ezekiel's successors, unable to stamp out the gatherings altogether, as the Puritans were unable to stamp out the merry-makings of Christmas-tide, did their best to smother them beneath a cloak of sheer religious tedium.²

If we want examples outside Israel, we can turn to any outspoken description of primitive life and faith. We can think (though not without repulsion) of the sculptures and the rites of many an Indian temple which priests and native rulers now try to veil from the European students of the "beautiful" religions of the East; or of the perplexing phenomena that have accompanied most Western revivals of religion. The emotions

¹ Romans 1²⁴⁻²⁷.

² Contrast the earlier Hebrew festivals with the regulations laid down for them in the later codes: Exodus 23¹⁴⁻¹⁷; Deut. 16¹⁻¹⁷; Numbers 28¹⁶⁻³¹, 29; C.B., p. 333.

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of religion and sex always lie near together, most of all during adolescence.

Here too can be seen the value of the ritual which was shaping itself in Ezekiel's mind. Destroy the possibility of the expression and you go far to stifle the emotion. The injunction to greet one another with a kiss of holiness may have other consequences beside the malicious innuendoes of Celsus. But clothe the virgin purity of true religion in fitting robes of ceremonial whiteness, and you will quench the unhallowed fires burning in the eyes of lust, and set the heart ridden by imperious desires at peace within itself.

But let us remark in closing that if idolatry is the handmaid of licentiousness, it is not less the tool of avarice and greed. For licentiousness and greed are blood-brothers. Their relationship was never clearer than in the present day. *Auri sacra fames* and the craving for forbidden sexual enjoyment are two manifestations of what is often one deep-rooted desire. And wealth is increasingly the minister of lust. This is not to say that the poor are without sin; though it is true that syphilis, the dread recording angel of sexual vice, moves more busily among the rich and leisured than amongst the hard-working and indigent. If lust, with drink and gambling, could be banished from the wealthy, it would soon grow manageable in the hovels and mean streets of the poor.

The sinister connection between the two, however, is clearer from another fact. It would perhaps be too much to say that the love of money is the root of the specific evil of lust, though with tens of thousands the desire to possess money suggests the enjoyment of what money alone can

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procure. But even if avarice and lust are two distinct diseases, they have a single and radical cure. This is not repression, regulation, or prohibition, satires on the ugliness of greed, which few believe, or lectures on the dangers of self-indulgence, to which few pay any attention except when they are untempted. The one cure, for society as for the individual, is to envisage the sin as a sin ; to see in it an outrage upon all that is holiest in God and purest in man and woman ; it will then be possible to track out its diabolical activity in prostituting all the gifts of God to a self-indulgence that by some inner necessity grows increasingly loathsome, and thus to cover it with its native filth as Ezekiel forced himself to do. A wise system of education will use the unavoidable consciousness of past wrong-doing, not to rouse a slavish fear of the results of sin, but an honest detestation of the sin itself. Along with this, opportunities for a return to evil ways will be cleared out of the path, and the alluring power of friendship and example will then more easily lead the wanderer into the assiduous practice of goodness and self-control.

Modern religious and social leaders have rarely travelled as far as this point. Ezekiel reached it, emphasised it, and was so far successful that among his own people the outward practice of idolatry became almost at once a thing of the past. Hardly a single idolatrous figure of Hebrew origin dating from any period after the return from exile has been dug up on the soil of Palestine. But few have recognised the debt they owe to the solitary prophet. He has waited for more than two thousand years for his insight as a reformer and his wisdom as a patriot to be greeted and revered.

CHAPTER IX

THE TURNING POINT

BETWEEN the romantic capture of Jerusalem by David from the Jebusites and its final siege and destruction by Nebuchadnezzar stretched a period of just over 400 years. It was an interval as long as that which separates the dawn of the Elizabethan age from our own day. During those crowded centuries the city had experienced every possible variety of fate. Now she was the centre of a wide empire, now reduced to the control of a few pitiful and ravaged acres underneath the shadow of her walls; now secure under the firm rule of a popular monarch; now torn by internal dissension and hatred; now united in the faith that Jahve, the God of the great ancestors of her people, was constant in His favour to her; now distracted at His seeming neglect and wildly searching for new protectors and cults. The one change that did not take place was a change of dynasty. She remained faithful to the house of David, and her prophets, however they condemned her life and her ambitions, had fixed their hopes on a descendant of that beloved family as the *flos regum* of the future.¹

At length the final blow fell. We have watched her long and brave defence, carried out with the

¹ Isaiah 97, 11¹; Micah 5²; Jeremiah 33¹⁷.

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tenacity which has animated her inhabitants in every age. But she could not offer an indefinitely extended resistance to the greatest military power of the age. She held out for two desperate years against Babylon, as six centuries later, she held out for two years against Rome. And then her walls were levelled with the ground, and the smouldering flame of hope in the mind of the exiles was quenched.

To most readers of the chequered story, the destruction of Jerusalem and the extinction of the Davidic monarchy brings the history of Israel to a close. But this was far from being the case. It was rather the centre, or the turning point, of that history. The greatest gifts of the Hebrews to the world have been produced by Judaism; and Judaism was not destroyed in the hour of ruin. It was born amid the flames that devoured the city. The fatal years of the siege, 588-586, B.C., mark the rise of the second, and for the religious thought of the world, the constructive period of the race.

The turning point in the nation's history was also the turning point in the career of Ezekiel. Large as the claim may appear, it was the issue of the crisis in the prophet's thought which determined its issue in the nation. All the characteristic conceptions of later Judaism can be traced back to Ezekiel; Ezekiel's constructive work begins with his reception of the news of the crash. Few investigations are more interesting than the effect of those agonising months upon him as he followed their events in his distant Mesopotamian exile. He had no interest in self-analysis. He has left us nothing with regard to the development of his own thoughts and feelings but scattered and unconscious hints.

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When these hints have not been recognised, the prophet has been misunderstood. He has been looked upon, in contrast to Jeremiah, as a man of one message, complete and whole from the moment when he began to speak. But to the sympathetic student, these hints are enough to help us to construct a fascinating chapter of religious biography.

In January, 587, Jerusalem was definitely invested. For four years Ezekiel had been predicting the fate of which this event was the prelude. On the very day when it took place, he was aware of it. Jahve, he said, informed him.¹ So he interpreted his psychic impression. Perhaps he was not, at bottom, less scientific than ourselves with our theories of telepathy and clairvoyance. His thoughts flew to the presumptuous and doomed leaders in the city. How confident they had been, and how blind. Long before, they had compared themselves to the meat within the caldron. Whatever happened to the city was only to perfect their own glory. An unlucky simile. They were indeed the meat—fat, bones and all—within the pot: but the pot was rusted; it was unusable. Before it could be cleaned, all the contents were to be poured out on the coals and the ground.²

It was a sombre turn which the prophet gave to the unforgotten boast. His neighbours must have shuddered at the unfeeling words. But Ezekiel himself was far from unfeeling. His own heart was wrung at the prospect. It was his fate to have to cover the deepest griefs with the sternest reproofs. For at the centre of his grief lay, not the calamity itself, but the "rebelliousness" which made calamity inevitable.

¹ Ezekiel 24².

² Ezekiel 24⁶⁻¹⁴; see pp. 95, 111.

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Had he been the unfeeling critic that he seemed, he would now have been able to experience the pride of triumphant prediction. No sane spectator could now doubt that the city's fall was anything but a matter of time. Jahve had justified His servant. The word in his mouth was true. But now, when the prophet's triumph might have tempered the grief of the patriot, another weight was placed upon him. His dearly loved wife was lying ill. The gloom outside his house called to the sorrow and forboding within. Was he to lose not only the glory of his country but also the very brightness of his own life? As he watched her pining away, the two griefs became one. He was losing her, the light of his eyes, as his fellow countrymen were losing their beloved city. He was, as it were, the visible embodiment, in his own bereavement, of the stupefying horror that was to fall upon them.

One morning the truth was borne in upon him in a flash of revealing light. His wife would take a sudden turn for the worse and pass away before nightfall; it lay with him, the desolated husband, to turn her death into a sign—to a discerning mind, the most impressive sign of all—of the coming end.¹

It was as he foresaw. With almost super-human self-command, he went about his usual work that morning and gave an address to his listeners. In the evening he was standing beside his wife's dead body. In the East, death is the occasion for loud and violent signs of grief; floods of tears, torn clothing, dishevelled hair. The news of the death in Ezekiel's house naturally spread at once. But when the friends and fellow-mourners arrived,

¹ Ezekiel 24¹⁵⁻¹⁷.

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they saw no outward trace of sorrow ; no alteration of dress ; no funeral meal. What could it mean ? Could it be true that the husband did not feel the blow ? So stern to his nation, was he also heartless for his own private loss ?

Sadly, and with no sign of his usual vehemence, he answered their unspoken questions. " Did I not love her ? And do you not love the city ? She shall be taken from you as my wife has been taken from me. And your mourning will be like mine. No outward trappings or ceremonial of woe. You will have no heart for that ; only a dull and paralyzing stupor of misery."

The most impressive sign of all. The time was gone by for symbolic play-acting ; a mimic siege, or a theatrical representation of a fugitive's escape by night from the beleaguered town. The deepest emotion that a noble heart can feel was turned into the text and substance of a discourse as moving as was ever uttered. Other public men have found in work for their nation an anodyne for bereavement like Ezekiel's. When John Bright was weeping over the grave of his newly-married wife, where all his young hopes lay buried, Cobden came to him and bade him find relief in a life of service to the cause of the oppressed and ill-fed masses of his country. Another politician, whose name is equally well-known and honoured, passed through a trial perhaps more searching because met in the central years of life rather than on its threshold. " Sir H. Campbell-Bannerman," as a colleague of his finely expressed it in the House of Commons, " had hardly attained the highest place, and made himself fully known, when a domestic trial, the saddest that can come to any of us, darkened his days

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and dealt what proved to be a mortal blow at his heart. But he never for a moment shirked his duty to the state. He laboured on—we have seen it at close quarters—he laboured on under stress and anxiety; and under a maiming sense of loss that was ever fresh, he was always ready to respond to every public demand.”¹ (

These words are strikingly true of Ezekiel. But in Ezekiel's case they do not exhaust the truth. Others could force themselves to leave the house of mourning for the platform or the office; to forget their grief at least for a time, in their absorption in their business. Ezekiel neither shut up his grief nor left it behind him. He made it the servant of his high calling. What would have been a profanation to a lesser mind became to him the supreme loyalty to Jahve.

A century and a half before Ezekiel, another great and much-tried man had risen to the same height. Hosea had a wife whom he loved dearly. She was not taken from him. Instead of that, she deserted him and plunged into shame and vice. He might have repudiated her. He refused to do so. He followed her. He wooed her back to him and to her children. He waited for her even till she was at her worst and most wretched. And when she at last returned with him, he knew that within his heart he had felt the very love of Jahve for Jahve's erring bride, the nation, and that his own wife's return was the symbol of submission to such a relentless pursuit of unconquerable affection.²

¶ Ezekiel's wife had not left him in this fashion. She had dwelt by his side all through his loneliness,

¹ Speech by Mr. Asquith in the House of Commons, April 27th, 1908.

² Hosea 2¹⁴⁻²³.

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his excitement, his perturbation of spirit, his visions of approaching ruin. Now, when all else was on the point of being lost, he lost her. Hosea had to preach the pardoning love of Jahve ; but first he had to learn it. ¹ Ezekiel did not only preach the desolation of his country. He lived it. His grief was not overcome. It was hallowed, consecrated into a veritable word of God. ²

Such loneliness as Ezekiel now had to face affects men, even the most susceptible, in different ways. He felt the paralysing sting of grief ; but with him to feel it was at once to counteract its influence by transforming it into a symbol. Its transformation was its conquest. It might have increased the weight of his dumbness. But a sudden shock may remove altogether a dumbness that is physical or nervous. ³ Ezekiel, by a curious extension of the principle, became convinced that his own dumbness would be removed later. When symbol was followed by reality, and the city itself would actually fall, the ban of silence in common intercourse would be removed. His first ordinary and natural words would be to the messenger who should bring the tidings.⁴

Such at least was what actually happened. And the prophet looking back on the day of his bereavement, felt that he foresaw it then. A careless incredulity is always unscientific ; and whether his darkest hour was shot through by this consciousness of a coming liberation or not, it is certain that a new calmness and detachment fell upon his spirit. From this day, no further message came to him for his distracted country. As to her destiny, he was silent through all the racking months

¹ Ezekiel 24²⁵⁻²⁷.

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of the long siege. His fellow exiles waited for tidings in agonised suspense, like soldiers who watch from the land, through fleeting mists, the issue of a sea-fight which will decide their own fate. From such subjects Ezekiel deliberately turned his mind. What more could be done by taking thought? He at all events knew no suspense. The future was clear to him, all save the actual moment when the news should come. And for that he could afford to wait. The bitterness was already past.

There is a story that David, when Bathsheba's little son was lying sick, gave himself up to immoderate grief; but as soon as the child actually lay dead, to the surprise of his court he at once resumed his ordinary life.¹ To Ezekiel, knowing that the city was now virtually dead, there came a similar liberation. It left his mind free for new activity. His interests, and his world, suddenly expanded.

Israel was, as a whole, a nation of peasants. Save when on military service, Hebrews who were not engaged in trade seldom travelled far from their native hills. Except for Levites out of a situation, like Micah in the old tale of the days of the Judges,² or for suitors who had business at the king's court,³ there was little need for common people to journey save in visits to religious shrines at festival time. But Palestine was no island, like Britain. The world's great trade-routes skirted its rugged hill-sides; the very name of Canaanite, borne by the older inhabitants of the foot-hills and the plains, was synonymous with "merchant."⁴ And the

¹ 2 Samuel 12²⁰.

² Judges 17⁸.

³ 2 Samuel 15².

⁴ Hosea 12⁷.

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upper classes had certainly a wide knowledge, social and political, of surrounding countries.

Ezekiel himself, as we have seen, had been abroad in his youth and his plastic mind had taken deep impressions from what he had seen. The political upheaval at home, and the immense burdens laid on his own soul, had for a time overlaid these ; now, in his enforced leisure, he was aware of them once more. The memories of busy foreign lands and cities rose before him, with their restless and adventurous commerce, their varied and unfamiliar products, their luxury and flaunting vice, and the pollutions—so the stern young priest had felt them—of the worship of their repulsive gods.

In his *Wanderjahre* he had been content to watch and frown and condemn ; now, the attitude of condemnation returned with a new meaning. He had already “ judged ” (so he phrased it) the guilt of his own Jerusalem ; but was Jerusalem more guilty than Tyre or Thebes, or even than her nearer neighbours, Ammon and Edom ? Could they hope to survive when she perished ? Impossible. To anyone who believed in the “ equality ” of Jahve’s ways, their ruin was certain.

Ezekiel’s predecessors had made denunciation of foreign nations one of the characteristics of prophecy. Amos, the earliest of them all, had delivered a thrilling discourse in which he used the sin and doom of the neighbours of the chosen people to heighten the horror of the sin in Judah’s own land.¹ Isaiah and Jeremiah, and prophets whose names have not survived, sometimes in vague and general terms, and sometimes with stern catalogues of the very names of offending towns and villages in the

¹ Amos I, 2^d-5.

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hated border countries, had foretold the disasters which Israel herself had never been able to inflict.¹ In similar language a fervent Scottish Covenanter might have testified against the thieving and godless Highland clans or the formidable and greedy persecutors across the southern border.

But Ezekiel, here as always, took his own line. For him, as for the rest, to think of Ammon and Moab was to think of the days when they would cease from troubling. But on them, comparatively insignificant as they were, both for good and evil in the world, he had no mind to pause. His imagination was dominated by the two mighty figures of Tyre and Egypt; the one the embodiment of the pride of trade and heaped-up wealth; like Venice, the bridegroom and lord of the sea; the other, the type of all that was great, and small, in national politics and ambition. As the days of the siege dragged on, he was elaborating weird pictures of these portentous figures. Tyre he saw as a huge ship, riding the high seas, and then quickly engulfed by the tempest. Egypt he saw as an enormous dragon, lying helpless beside the river which could protect it no longer, or a gigantic tree flung down by the banks of the canal that had watered its roots. The result was three poems upon Egypt—the compositions on Tyre were not finished till later—which appeared when the siege had lasted for about a year.²

But before the further poems of the series could be completed, the fall of the city became imminent. News reached the exiled community at Tel-Abib but slowly; but with the curious intuition of which we have already seen the traces, Ezekiel

¹ Isaiah 13-23; Jeremiah 46-51.

² Ezekiel 29, 30, 31.

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was aware of what was coming. Instead of rousing fresh denunciations or warnings, it touched in him a deeper note. It recalled to him the old command to act as a watchman over the people. The new era was upon them. They would need all his care. Had he fulfilled the task hitherto? Once more and in a still more sympathetic fashion, he set himself to expound the principle of individual responsibility, always, to him, the foundation of the lore of the watchman. His hearers, now hopelessly depressed by their own knowledge and his predictions, had little attention to spare for such a discourse; and with a sudden access of pity, he carried it on, as he had done before, but now with more explicitness, to its more hopeful corollary; if sin means death, repentance means life.¹

At last the news came. One morning in midwinter a fugitive from Palestine arrived. "The city is smitten." A special weight had lain upon the prophet all night. The hand of Jahve, he said, was heavy on him. The dark hours were still darker with the knowledge of the tale which the messenger was hurrying through the night to deliver.² In the morning the fugitive arrived, and gave his shattering news. The shock lifted the sense of dumbness which had oppressed Ezekiel. His first act was to deliver another discourse to the sorrowing crowd standing round him.

That the news should have caused such a shock cannot but surprise us. Had not the prophet known for months what was coming? Was anything ~~thing~~ left to him but to say "I told you so"? We must not overrate the prophetic assurance. Certainty may often dwell next door to doubt. How

¹ Ezekiel 33¹⁻²⁰.

² Ezekiel 33^{21,22}.

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many, during the late years of war, believed that the Allies would conquer, and yet wondered if they would escape defeat? And this is still more true when certainty inspires now hope, now fear, and belief in the mind has to wrestle with unbelief in the wish, or the heart. We know the crash will come; but we cannot realise it. We refuse to contemplate life in a world in which it has come. We wait for the awful moment. We outlive it in our thought. And yet all the while something whispers within us "it has not come yet; will it really come at all?" When it does come, for all our previous certainty, we are overwhelmed; we are paralysed; or else, by the very force of the deluge, we are shaken into new energy and action.

With Ezekiel the paralysis preceded the shock. The shock came, and he was once more himself. "So this," he cried, "is the end of all their confidence. They said, The country is ours, not yours. If it was, how they misused it with their arrogant impiety. But it is not theirs. It is a no-man's land; desolate, abhorred."

It was a strange address for such a moment. It could hardly be said to rise to the height of the occasion. But this can surprise no one. It was too soon for a majestic oration to form itself in his mind. And had he not delivered such an oration already? He might have said what Beethoven said on receiving the news of the death of Napoleon, "I have already completed the composition to mark this event."

What he did say was what came into his mind on that miserable morning. And he was left at its close with nothing but a disheartening sense of futility and helplessness. He was a speaker without influence. His hearers listened and then dismissed

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the subject. He even smiled at himself bitterly. They gathered before him as an audience might gather to hear the lovely voice of a famous singer—as if anyone could think that Ezekiel's harsh threatening tones were æsthetically beautiful! It is the one touch of humour in what the prophet has left us. How sardonic, and how characteristic!¹

But the reaction was natural. He was left utterly alone. The great disaster in Palestine was as poignant a grief to him as to them. Time had done nothing to soften the loss of his wife; and there were no children to help to fill her place in his heart. Now he saw with a clearness hitherto mercifully withheld from him that he stood alone in the community; so completely alone that he was not merely opposed or disbelieved; he was not even taken seriously. The splendid task set before him, which might have resulted in heroic leadership or still more heroic martyrdom, led to nothing but patronising and superficial applause. He did not complain. He did not, like Jeremiah, alternate between wild reproaches to his neighbours and still wilder expostulations with Jahve. He bore it in silence. The immense tragedy had left the Jews round him as dull-witted and stone-cold as ever. But some day they would know that the author of the whole drama of their history was Jahve. That would be enough for him. After these six years, they might treat him, summoned as he had been by Jahve no less than Jeremiah himself, as no more than a popular entertainer. He was content to wait.²

¹ Ezekiel 33³⁰⁻³².

² Ezekiel 33³³.

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THE Hebrew prophets were men whose interest centred on the home affairs of their country. They looked for a moral re-birth of their people. The fate of other nations therefore did not greatly concern them. And in the seventh and eighth centuries B.C. there were no journals with active and well-informed correspondents, and no governments or chambers of commerce with staffs of consuls or foreign agents to keep the home society alive to what was happening abroad. Ignorance of foreigners was deep, though perhaps not more deep than that of the period when to the average Englishman the inhabitants of France were chiefly remarkable for wearing wide trousers and eating frogs. As slender was the general knowledge of the diplomacy and politics of other countries. Preachers and historians alike reflect the uninstructed talk of the bazaars rather than the cautious experience of the state council. How little the author of the book of Kings suspects the real motives and fears of Aháb or Jehu.

In the story of Jonah the description of the state of things in Nineveh is frankly that of a city in a fairy story.¹ Even the penetrating references in

¹ Jonah 33.4.7.

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the greater prophets are the comments of an intelligent spectator from the outside, like Shakespeare when he is dealing with the foreign relations of England in the fifteenth century, or Herodotus when he is describing what he had gathered from the local priests about the antiquities of Egypt. Such materials are not without their value for the historian ; but they are valuable not so much for what is narrated but (and often this is more important) for the state of mind of the narrator.

This ignorance produced, as it always will, a general dislike and hatred of foreigners. It was not organised, as later during the dispersion and through the long and bitter centuries of Christian persecution. It was even opposed vigorously by the ruling classes, as Ezekiel had marked with burning and indiscriminating indignation. But it was widespread among the more conservative mass of the people.

On the other hand, as we have pointed out, the world of the Hebrews was small. However doubtful their welcome, traders from every country in the near East had to pass through Palestine. Geographically, indeed, Palestine lay at the centre of the Eastern world. Around it, with a significant symmetry, the other nations were arranged in two concentric circles. On the circumference of the inner circle were the smaller peoples, Ammon, Moab, Edom, the Philistines, and Syria ; all of them crowded into a district that was really, as Dr. G. A. Smith has called it, a great oasis on the edge of the desert ; all of them hungering for outlets for their population and their trade.

It was a situation like that of the Balkan peoples at the beginning of this century. Every move-

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ment in each of the restless little countries roused jealousy and resistance in the others. No wonder that their foreign policy was little more than a preparation for springing at each other's throats. Memories of past outrages, clashing interests in the present, and the dread of some sudden swoop in the future, combined to make peace and goodwill impossible. We might be studying the condition of Ireland to-day.

There was another reason for this undying flame of hate. Outside the inner circle of little nations lay the greater powers, Egypt, Assyria and Babylon, with rivalries and irreconcilable ambitions of their own. The principles of their conduct were precisely what might have been expected; the time-honoured principles of the greater powers of Turkey, Austria, Italy, and Germany in dealing with the Balkan peoples. To keep the smaller nations in a continual state of intrigue and unrest, to play off the *protégé* of one power against the dependant of another, was the natural means to acquire influence, weaken a competitor, and prepare for the inevitable war of the future.

However little Serbs and Bulgars might know of the real state of things in Austria and Germany, the ominous names have ever been on their lips. It was the same with Israel and her mighty enemies. The Hebrews knew little of the characters and even the names of the Egyptian kings. They spoke of the Pharaoh as we spoke of the Kaiser or the Czar. But they cherished pregnant memories of their slavery beside the Nile and their deliverance in the desert; and they were shrewd enough to discount Egyptian promises of help and their own hopes of Egyptian support by their knowledge of her "slim-

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ness" and inactivity. Just when her troops were needed, they were never there.¹ So Serbia might have doubted the sincerity of Great Britain in 1915; but the Hebrews, happily for them, never attained Serbia's touching and desperate confidence in her great but perplexing ally.

Assyria, lying across the desert to the east, as Egypt lay across the desert to the south-west, had an even more sinister reputation. The journey to Nineveh was much more laborious than the journey to the Nile. But year after year the magnificently equipped legions of Assyria had appeared on the borders of Palestine, and the policy of frightfulness to which their generals were devoted, anticipated, though they never quite equalled, the horrors of Belgium and Armenia. It was not strange that, balanced between the two, the Hebrews turned to Egypt rather than to her terrible rival.

Of Babylon, the third great power, less was known until the last years of the southern kingdom. Formerly, Babylonian culture had dominated Palestine more completely than German fashions and administrative methods have ever dominated Western Russia. From the tenth century onwards, this influence, which had been social and financial rather than political, decayed; it rose again, in a new and military form, when the fall of Assyria in the seventh century gave Babylon her chance of stepping into the vacant place. Babylon was the great menace to the Near East in the days of Jeremiah and Ezekiel, as Assyria had been in the days of Isaiah.

But from the Hebrew people, Babylon received a very different treatment. Save for one impressive

¹ Isaiah 305.7. Jer. 37.7.

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passage,¹ Jeremiah was a consistent "pacifist" and pro-Babylonian. Ezekiel never uttered a word against Babylonian power or pride. The reasons are not far to seek. Jeremiah was convinced that the struggle against Babylon was hopeless; and for the exiles in Babylon itself an attack on the government might have resulted in a dumbness more serious than Ezekiel's actual limitation. There were doubtless other reasons also. Until the rise of Persia, Babylon was the most respectable of the ancient empires. She even made some attempt, like imperial Rome, at the disinterested government of her provinces, and though Ezekiel did not, or could not, speak of Babylon as a great restraining power, in the terms which Paul used of Rome, he recognised the difference in the spirit of her conduct. It was left for his successor, the second Isaiah, at the end of the exile, to overwhelm the Babylonian empire by his triumphant satire,² and to the author of Daniel, in a still later age, when the Greek rulers of Syria were threatening the very existence of Judaism, to turn Babylon into an embodiment of impious pride and idolatry.³

To the modern reader, these prophecies against the nations to which we now turn, are among the least attractive portions of Hebrew literature. Obscure, dull and harsh, they also seem to reflect all that was narrowest and even most "Jingoistic" in the Hebrew mind. But they reflect something far more than this; something which would never have come into the minds of the Hebrews or of anyone else if the prophets had not put it there;

¹ Jer. 25²⁶. 'Sheshach' there stands for Babylon. Contr., e.g., Jer. 21^{4f}. Jer. 50, 51 is not by Jeremiah himself.

² Isaiah 47.

³ Daniel 2-5.

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an indomitable faith in Jahve as the ruler of the nations and the governor of the world.

We are accustomed to talk slightly of the Hebrew belief in a "tribal" god. A tribal god is a god who asserts the claims of his *protégés* against the gods of other tribes. Whatever the mass of the Hebrews may have believed at different times, this was never the view of the prophets. Jahve was not the god of one tribe, however favoured; He was the god of all nations. And He was no absentee ruler. He had one law for all, and that law would be vindicated for all. The opening words of written prophecy in Amos are characteristic of its whole development. Jahve is no partisan. He is the supreme and impartial judge. It is true that the prophets did not carry out this mighty conception, so rarely accepted to-day, to its proper conclusion. Most of them, quite naturally, had little sympathy with their turbulent and greedy and brutal neighbours. They did not see that if Jahve's justice was over all the nations, His mercy and love must be over them all as well. But the state of Christendom in the twentieth century gives us little cause to cast stones at them; and there were occasions when they rose to the height of their argument, as when Isaiah prophesied that Israel should make a third with Egypt and Assyria in a kind of triple alliance of obedience to Jahve,¹ or when the anonymous author of Jonah spoke of Jahve's sympathy with the little children and dumb animals of Nineveh,² or when later in the exile the great prophet of the return saw the suffering of Israel turned into the means of the evangelisation of the world.³

¹ Isaiah 19²⁴.

² Jonah 4¹¹.

³ Isaiah 49⁶; cf. Romans 11¹².

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Most of these prophetic oracles were flung out at different and uncertain times, and collected later, without much reference to the occasions of their delivery. But in this part of his work, as in every other, Ezekiel offers a complete contrast to his predecessors. Until the siege of Jerusalem, his attention was engaged by other and more pressing subjects. But when he had exhausted his warnings to his own people, his thoughts turned naturally to the seething nations across the frontier; naturally, because destruction would only be a prelude to restoration, and a new Israel meant a new humanity.

This truth Ezekiel put to himself somewhat differently. The new Israel could only arise if all the old evil things in Palestine were swept away. And evil, like bad labour conditions, was a phenomenon of international significance. How could piety in Israel be safe if the barbarities of Ammon and Moab continued unchecked, and the organised greed and hypocrisy of Tyre and Egypt infected the whole world?

Thus, while the storm of destruction was raging over the hill of Zion, Ezekiel was calmly summoning the nations to the bar of Jahve's judgment, and pronouncing their well-merited and inevitable fate. The result was a series of compositions, some of which show haste and impatience, while others reach a height of sustained poetic power unsurpassed by the prophet or indeed by any other Hebrew writer. It culminates in a marvellous picture of the old bad powers of the past gathered in the underworld, which reminds us now of the naïve directness of the *Odyssey*, now of the clear-cut and terrible scenery of the *Inferno*.

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Unlike the rest of Ezekiel's works, this section is not arranged in chronological order. First comes the great series of poems on Egypt.¹ When this was nearly completed, Ezekiel added four short denunciations of Judah's nearer neighbours, immediately after the actual fall of the city;² then the Tyre poems were composed,³ and later still the remaining poem on Egypt, and the magnificent conclusion of the whole collection.⁴ It is important to bear in mind this order, as much light is thrown thereby on the prophet's inner purpose and thought.

With the exception of the "oracles" on Ammon and the other border states, these chapters are very different in tone from the attacks on the nations left by the other prophets. The same detachment which enabled Ezekiel, save for one brief critical moment, to hold himself silent and apart while the city was in her last agony, kept him free from any merely nationalistic exultation in the coming doom of the two great heathen powers. He looked at them even more completely *sub specie aeternitatis* than another great exile, Dante, looked at the wolf-like powers of his own day. This can be clearly seen in the elaborate imagery of the poems. Few of Ezekiel's discourses are without the illuminating phrases which mark the true artist in words; but here at last he gives full rein to the poet's impulse and fancy. His mood, indeed, is serious and sombre throughout; his eye rolls in a fine frenzy; but this only adds to the tragic weight of his diction. These songs are the nearest parallel in literature to the choral odes of Aeschylus.

The whole series owes its origin to a kind of break

¹ Ezekiel 29-31.

² Ezekiel 25.

³ Ezekiel 26-28.

⁴ Ezekiel 32.

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or reaction in Ezekiel's mind. Always sensitive to what was being said or thought around him, he generally pondered the words of others in order to attack them. Now, however, the strain of events for a time has told on him. For once, he makes the thought of others his own. While the armies of Nebuchadnezzar were closing more and more tightly round the city, the promised help of Egypt was looked for eagerly but in vain. "A broken reed," cried the disappointed and anguished Jews. Isaiah had used the phrase more than a century before.¹ It was truer than ever to-day. It flew from mouth to mouth.

This time Ezekiel sympathised. After all, he felt, there is guilt elsewhere than in Judah. And he drew a picture of the great dragon or crocodile of Egypt, dragged from its lair in the river, and flung on the dry land to be a prey to its once timorous foes. For a whole generation would the land lie desolate: and never would its old strength be recovered. This striking utterance was followed almost at once by four short odes of doom against Egypt, and, just before the fall of the city, by a definite prediction of the country's subjugation by Nebuchadnezzar, or rather by the sword of Jahve, which Jahve Himself would put into Nebuchadnezzar's hand. Two months later prediction swelled into the triumph of an accomplished fact. Like some mighty cedar of Lebanon, Egypt had grown into the proudest of the trees of the world. Jahve had made her of surpassing beauty. Now, by a stroke of celestial nemesis, she was to be flung down. From her fall, the whole world would learn the perils of pride: and when her king entered the

¹ Isaiah 36⁶.

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world of the dead, with all his slaughtered hosts, consternation would fill the earth.¹

It is a weird vision ; the defeated armies driven into the underworld—one of the first clear references in Hebrew literature to the popular belief in Hades familiar to us among the Greeks, and certainly more widespread among the Hebrews than their surviving books would suggest.

Later on, Ezekiel was to make further use of it. But before he could work out his conception, his thoughts were turned elsewhere. The city fell. The tragedy occasioned an outburst of brutal *Schadenfreude* in all the little border nations. Their spiteful hostility made an enduring impression upon its victims. Ezekiel responded to it at once. In four short odes he announced the vengeance of Jahve on the “stabs in the back” from Ammon, Moab, Edom and the Philistines. None of his poems fell in more completely with the mood of his hearers. For a moment he was indeed the “popular artiste.”²

But only for a moment. Behind these smaller nations lay Tyre. Tyre also had shown her exultation over the fate of Jerusalem. True, Tyre had never played a large part in the political world of the Hebrews. She had been an ally rather than a foe ; a close ally when in the days of Solomon her craftsmen had helped to build the temple ; and too close when Ahab took his wife and his court religion from her palace. There could in the nature of things be but little rivalry between the commercial mistress of the seas and the power whose only considerable chance of wealth lay in her ability to control trade routes on land. But Ezekiel was not

¹ Ezekiel 31.

² Ezekiel 25.

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really thinking of Tyre in terms of politics or financial competition. He saw in her a pride akin to the pride that he had seen in Egypt ; a pride that sent her fleets to every coast and poured the treasure of every country into her port. He did not see her as some bloated and soulless plutocracy, like the repulsive figure of Mammon in Watts' well-known picture. She exercised a strange fascination over him. The song of doom had no sooner begun than it changed into a dirge.

As a young man he had marvelled at her brilliance as he walked on her quays and passed through her markets ; he shuddered at her materialism ; he could not but admire her splendour. And now that in mature years he saw clearly her fate, he felt that a compelling beauty and wonder was passing from the world.

It was indeed passing : soon it would have passed. The devastating armies of Babylon were at her gate. She would be a bare rock, a terror, a memory. And yet, how could one but lament her fall ? She had gathered all the nations to work together at the mighty galleon of her commerce ; peoples with strange uncouth names had joined with the mightiest leaders of the ancient world to labour for her. At last the great ship was ready. She took the sea with the proud full sail of universal admiration ; and then the storm fell upon her, and she foundered. And at the sight of that wreck rose a wailing cry from every land, whose echo was heard centuries after by that other exile in Patmos. The brilliant and romantic career shaped by merchant adventurers, chartered companies, pioneers of trade (to use modern terms for things which réappear from age to age) will always have its devotees. There has

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lived one poet who saw, stretched above it all, the sentence of death.¹

For once the poet in Ezekiel was getting the better of the prophet. A comparison with another dirge over Tyre, now included in the prophecies of Isaiah,² will show the power and range of Ezekiel's genius. But his mood quickly changed. His rhapsody was followed by a brief and sharp straight-forward denunciation. And then his fancy took possession of him once more; it carried him back into the world of myths even then ancient and half-forgotten; and he saw the prince of the city as the fabled being who dwelt perhaps before Adam in Paradise, and was cast out, like another Lucifer, for pride in his beauty, wealth and wisdom.³ Nemesis again.

Such thoughts as these filled the prophet's mind in the first months of Jerusalem's desolation. Was she to suffer alone? He actually forgot her fate in that of the haughty empires round her. And now, nearly two years after that fatal summer, the old figure of Egypt as the dying and helpless dragon recurred to him. The dragon was to be snared in a net as the Babylonian sea-monster, Tiamat, of whom he perhaps had heard at Nippur, was ensnared by Marduk.⁴ This time he gave a new edge to the thought by announcing that the agent of its destruction was to be Babylon.⁵

Immediately after, something happened which we can only compare to the raising of a curtain at the back of a stage, which reveals an unsuspected yet essential scene beyond. The poet had seen first

¹ Ezekiel 27.

² Isaiah 23.

³ Ezekiel 28, C.B.

⁴ Cf. p. 108; and see also Ezekiel 12¹³, 17²⁰, 19⁸.

⁵ Ezekiel 32¹⁻¹⁶.

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one kingdom and then another hurled into ruin ; now he beheld the hosts of all the armies in the world crowded together into the land of the dead ; some of them, the more heroic, ranged with something of their old majesty in the great gloomy halls : others, who had outraged humanity by cruelty and lawlessness, huddled in the dark caverns beyond. They had terrified the living in their day ; now they are themselves helpless shades ; all the world's pomp, ambition and fury, gathered into one vast grave. It is an awe-inspiring picture, Miltonic in its vague grandeur ; and the effect is strangely heightened by a phrase which rings through the entire poem like a knell, "uncircumcised, slain by the sword." All are there, Asshur, Elam, Edom : and then into their midst are driven Pharaoh and his legions, down into that endless night, overwhelmed by their own shame, and yet "comforted" (the most characteristic touch of all) to see congregated around them and sharing their humiliating fate, the whole military prowess of the past.¹

It would be beside the mark to ask whether Ezekiel believed that such a hall of the dead actually existed. As well ask whether Dante believed in his own Malebolge, or Milton in his Pandemonium. The fate of a world falling into ruins before Ezekiel's own eyes could only be expressed in such a picture. The significant part is that he saw it. The evil world of the cruel centuries of the past was at an end. The war had been fought that was to bring war to an end. The tortuous and hypocritical diplomacy which had set Ezekiel's world at variance, the flaunting pride of riches which had

¹ Ezekiel 32¹⁷⁻³², C.B.

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lifted itself up above the laws of man and God, and the old grim empires which had trusted in nothing but force and expanded by nothing but rapine and greed, had gone. Other forms of wealth, diplomacy, world-power have arisen to curse the earth since that day. But they arise only to fall. The doom of the world-system of the seventh century before Christ is the doom of every nation in which its spirit is reborn. So let all Thine enemies perish, O Jahve !

CHAPTER XI

RESTORATION AND REPENTANCE

Two years after the fall of the city, Ezekiel's series of poems on the nations is complete. We have noticed the striking marks of unity which the series exhibits, as striking as in the case of the anonymous songs on the mission of "the Servant of Jahve" now scattered up and down the prophecies of Ezekiel's successor. But though a unity, these poems form an integral part of the whole structure of his work. He is a conspicuous example of the rule that the spirits of the prophets, their great bursts of inspiration, are subject to the prophets; the sub-conscious is under the control of the conscious, or rather, let us say, under the control of a conception that lies deeper in the mind than conscious and sub-conscious alike.

With the great scene in the under-world just described, Ezekiel completes the first part of his work. He has now finally cleared the ground for the great building of the future. Israel's sin has worked itself out; and the evil influences from outside which had tempted and seduced her are likewise at an end. Now at last the architect of the new nation can begin his real task. Like the group of statesmen which gathered in Paris at the end of the great war in the hope of creating an entirely new thing in history, a league of the nations

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to enforce peace and ensure international justice, he can look into the future, where the evil traditions of the now irrevocable past can no longer twist the aims and blight the ideals of humanity and faith.

The arrival of the messenger from the captured city was the signal for the removal of the prophet's dumbness. A weight was lifted immediately both from his speech and from his mind.¹ At first we hardly perceive the effects of the change. We cannot indeed expect to do so. For his dumbness never prevented the prophet from expressing his thoughts when they reached the point of absolute clearness and conviction. And he never broke this rule of expression after the lifting of the weight. We might look to the poems on the nations as evidences of renewed powers of speech ; but the earlier members of the series were written while the dumbness still lay heavy upon him.

Later on we shall find that Ezekiel was in close and constant intercourse with at least one section of his fellow-exiles ; but the real signs of the lifting of the ban of silence are to be found in the new spirit that now begins to breathe in his work. The dark and tortured night has ended. The dawn appears, though in no cloudless beauty. It is grey and somewhat chill. But with it comes a breath of vitality and hope, a stirring of confidence and assurance, as from the untainted spaces beyond the eastern horizon. And although one can hardly tell the moment when the sun actually rises, the world is bright ; and one can move upon its shining hill-sides with ease and increasing joy.

The author of the chapters we have now to consider was not a man who held himself aloof from

¹ Ezekiel 33²², C.B.

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his companions in solitary brooding or sudden and volcanic utterance. His periods are still rugged ; but their outlines are softened by human intercourse and frank and earnest talk. To pull down, the prophet may dwell in the desert with Elijah and John the Baptist ; but to build up, he must mix with other men, like Paul or Jesus Himself. And this is what Ezekiel was now able to do.

Hence in the gloomy days after the news had arrived on the Chebar, Ezekiel, who had surprised his neighbours so often, surprised them again. They had not left off wondering at his conduct after his wife's death, when they were forced to wonder at the subdued but unmistakable cheerfulness with which he met their own despair. They were inclined at first to put it down, resentfully, to confidence based on successful predictions. But Ezekiel was far too great to take a mean pride in such a success as this. The thing that was really justified, he knew, was not his foresight but his faith, or rather, the righteousness and truth of Jahve Himself.

And now that these were at last placed by the tragedy of 586 beyond the reach of all doubt, there was no longer any need for him to play the part of his country's "judge." People had never suspected in him the poet who thought of his country "as a lover or a child." But such was the truth. And now the lover was set free. He could bend his whole mind to the task of accomplishing the recovery of the object of his affection.

The task was indeed a serious one ; so serious that the ardent tones of the lover can never be heard ; only overheard at best. The nation was

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to be re-created. It must be, if Jahve's purpose was to be fulfilled. Yet, how could it be, if Jahve's righteousness was to be maintained? For it was lying helpless, dead; there were no seeds of life or goodness from which the new obedience could spring up. How could the past be blotted out? How could Jahve treat Israel as if she had been faithful instead of adulterous? "When the wicked man turns from his wickedness to morality and honesty, he shall live by such conduct"¹; so Ezekiel had said; so he was to say again. But how could it be done? What was to make him turn? Evil, as Ezekiel was convinced in the bottom of his heart, brings punishment and death; then how, out of the corpse, could life once more be born?

The necessity of answering this question resulted in a piece of profound thinking, as profound indeed as any offered in the Old Testament. As a rule, the Hebrew mind is not philosophical. It moves from intuition to intuition; and if the two conceptions clash, one is dropped or both are held in an unrecognised inconsistency. The outstanding example of this is the book of Job, which really attempts to reconcile opposite convictions or truths, as it was said of a much later system of philosophy, by the apotheosis of a negation. God is just; yet a good man may suffer; both statements are true, because God's ways are far past man's finding out.

But a conclusion reached by such a process as this could not satisfy Ezekiel. As before, the only moment in his own thought which he troubles to illuminate for us is the moment when the solution reached him; and that it reached him, and was

¹ Ezekiel 18²⁷: 33¹⁹.

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not reached by him, he is clear. But it was preceded by long periods of arduous intellectual labour. Indeed, it would seem that each stage of the prophet's activity called out some special aspect of his consciousness. First, vision; next, emotion; then thought; afterwards, when he was dealing with foreign peoples, imagination; and now, still more concentrated meditation. Later on, thought was to pass into the inventive faculty of the architect or the artist.

Unfortunately, in this, the most original section of his work, Ezekiel has not chosen to give us any indications of time. All he has done is to place his work between the poems on the nations, concluded two years after the city's fall, and his picture of the ideal future, which he dates twelve years later. But in so doing, he has really given us valuable guidance. His picture of the future was itself the result of long concentration of thought, and the very absence of dates in the section now before us shows that his convictions did not burst upon him at some sudden isolated moment, their very unexpectedness stamping the time of its occurrence upon his memory. The truth is that in this case, as in others, the ground was no sooner cleared for the question than it rose before him, and he set himself to grapple with it at once.

Here then is the question. The world that lay around Israel is swept and garnished, cleared of evil and pride. But Israel herself is dead, fallen in her sin. How can she be restored? Fleeting glimpses of a restoration had already passed before the prophet's eyes, even when he was turning them away from the actual ruins of Jerusalem to the fate of the nations. Now that he came to gaze upon the

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city in the very hour of her fate, he was conscious of something that had hardly found even fleeting expression before, a deep pity. The flock had been scattered, harried, lost; the hungry sheep had not been fed; the wolf, not with "privy paw" but open and unobserved, had daily "devoured apace." Where were the shepherds? Theirs was the guilt. Theirs would be the punishment. The people had been misgoverned, misguided. Their heart was sound. Give them good leadership, and they would respond.¹

That leadership Jahve would surely vouchsafe. He would Himself be their shepherd; and when He had brought them back, He who had given them David, the shepherd prince (Ezekiel always thoroughly disliked and deliberately avoided the title of "king")², would give them another prince to lead them, with David's shepherd rod, to green pastures and still waters.³

Ezekiel was thinking, not of thrones or crowns, but men. Yet he was no democrat. His message was no reiteration of the simple cry, "Trust the people." He had no illusions. He knew how far the people had fallen, in vice, oppression, and despair. His was rather the faith of Ebenezer Elliott. For all their degradation they are the flowers of Jahve's heart, as it were, not weeds to be flung into the oven. Equally removed from scorn and from adulation of the crowd, neither an oligarch nor a demagogue, he knew that their chief need was guidance.

The thought is a pregnant one. Politicians and journalists to-day, as in every age, will do anything with the people but shepherd them; oppress,

¹ Ezekiel 34.

² Except in chap. 37^{22,24}.

³ Ezekiel 34²⁴.

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cajole, exploit, bribe; play upon every weakness, pander to every vice. Ezekiel, seeing the multitudes like sheep that have no shepherd, had compassion on them. The result was the tenderest and most moving discourse he ever pronounced, and the discovery, hardly guessed at by the greatest leaders of men, that if you would help or save the people, you must love them.

Love must be the impelling force in all political and social activity. But love must be guided by wisdom. And we might have expected that Ezekiel, having reached this point, would go on to consider how love would act—explain the loving craft of the shepherd of his people's souls. But he has another surprise in store for us. So rarely did he give rein to his sympathy that when he did, he found it hard to regain his self-control. The tide of his pity had borne him where he was peculiarly *en rapport* with his neighbours. He was sharing to the full their thoughts on Israel; and immediately another thought of theirs, carried in on the tide as it were, made itself felt. For them, pity for Israel was hatred for Edom. Edom's malicious joy in the exile produced a hatred towards her in the Jewish mind which no other foe could rival and no lapse of time could efface.

Ezekiel had already expressed his mind upon Edom.¹ Now he returns to the subject. His friends had listened to his "shepherd discourse" with delight. But it did not satisfy them. "It is not these shepherds only that have betrayed the flock. The wolves from Mount Seir have harried the sheep; and they will harry them again. What can you shepherds do against those ruthless beasts

¹ Ezekiel 25¹²⁻¹⁴.

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of prey ? ” The question was a challenge. Ezekiel could not fail to take up the gage. Jahve was not to be baulked by Edom. Israel's return would be the signal for Edom's fall. Hers, not Israel's, would be the lasting and merited desolation.¹ Years afterwards, while the prophecy was still unfulfilled, another great poet took up the theme, and pictured a divine conqueror returning alone as from the tumult of a wine-press, bathed in blood, from that country of hate and spite. Later eyes have seen in that figure a foreshadowing of the Redeemer of the world ; and when he was born among men, on the throne of Judah sat—Herod of Edom.²

Hatred, however, can reveal nothing and instruct no one. It has its work to do in the mind of the patriot. It steels him against any dangerous complacency to temptation, and protects him from the seductions of evil within and without his frontiers. But it can never build up ; only love and enthusiasm can do that. And in Ezekiel's mind at this period the tide of love was still running strong. From the parched and desolate mountains of Edom he looked across to the hills of Palestine, the hills by whose majesty and variety his boyhood had been haunted ; and his heart glowed. Trampled upon by alien and cruel feet, with every wady defiled by their passage, they should once more be restored to their rightful inhabitants. Every mountain torrent should thunder as before ; and the awful voice should sound with ringing clearness in the ears of freedom.³

Thus the promise of restoration grew in fulness and beauty. But the question of the means of

¹ Ezekiel 35.

² Isaiah 63¹⁻⁶.

³ Ezekiel 36¹⁻¹⁵.

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its accomplishment was still unanswered. To reinstate the nation would be nothing, unless it was worthy of re-instatement. As well re-house the slum-dweller, and leave him to use the bath as a coal-box. The knowledge that, if left to himself, he will use it in that fashion is no argument against re-housing him; it is a most potent argument against being satisfied with re-housing apart from education.

And at last the answer is forthcoming. It marks an enormous ethical and theological advance. And yet it is not entirely a discovery of the moment. Like many another thinker, Ezekiel elaborated his great conception only to find that, in the germ, it had been present, almost unrecognised, in his mind, long before.¹ Its novelty lies in its explicitness, and in its position as an answer to this particular question. Unless some searching question goes before it, a statement often remains deprived of half its significance and value.

The nation had sinned, as hopelessly as our Europe of yesterday, sunk in an orgy of greed, cunning and cruelty. Inevitably, it had been scattered to the winds. But it would be gathered again. Jahve could not be balked. Israel perpetually exiled, like the nations of Europe perpetually heaping up armaments against each other, till each fell beneath the intolerable weight, would be nothing but Jahve's own abdication of His throne. He was bound to bring them back, to give them human thoughts and feelings instead of the hard senseless stones of their own lusts and enmities; a new breath to animate the old worn-out bodies.²

With this gift would come another; the old

¹ Ezekiel 36¹⁶⁻³⁸; cf. 16⁶⁰⁻⁶³, 20⁴⁰⁻⁴⁴.

² Ezekiel 36²⁶.

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prosperity would return. Purged from the distracting impulses of the past, the nation would have time and a mind to develop its own resources ; for there is no wastefulness like that born of greed and hatred, and no prosperity like that born of a law-abiding and moral society. "The magic of property," said Arthur Young, "turns sand into gold." The alchemist's transformation should been have attributed to honesty and soberness.¹

Then, when the old evils have disappeared and the memory of famine is but a bad dream, comes the crowning change. The past rises before Israel, not only in its misery but in its degradation and loathsomeness. It exhibits the sin which was the cause and origin of its wretchedness. "Vice is a monster of so frightful mien as to be hated needs but to be seen." It is the surprising and indeed epoch-making view of Ezekiel that vice is revealed, not by its consequences, but by the contrast offered by an undeserved and complete deliverance and restoration. Nothing else could so reveal it. During the period of punishment, horror for sin, if it arose at all, would of necessity be mingled with the misery caused by its results. When those results are removed, there is nothing to loathe but the sin itself.²

We can regard this remarkable statement from two points of view : as a social and political principle, or as a psychological and moral fact. It is strikingly valuable in either case. In the first, it amounts to the rule, "Give the people freedom and they will prove worthy of it." Whenever we have had the courage to follow this rule, it has vindicated itself. The most conspicuous example in modern

¹ Ezekiel 36²⁸⁻³⁰.

² Ezekiel 36³¹.

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times is in South Africa. But what of the horrors of the French Revolution, or of the revolutions that have accompanied the closing months of the great war? They only prove the truth of the complementary axiom, "Withhold freedom, and it will sooner or later be demanded with violence." The crimes of Jacobinism and Bolshevism are not to be laid at the door of freedom; they are the result of the selfishness and apathy which refused freedom till it could be refused no longer. Violence does not spring from freedom but from tyranny. The downfall of ancient despotisms which the world has contemplated in our own days cries out for the further application of the axiom. Only one thing must be carefully assured; watch that the freedom is real, and not simply transference from one despotism to another. Life under an autocratic and repressive government is a bad school even for the most ardent and high-minded patriot. When the most absolute of monarchies has been removed, its spirit may survive in the covetousness and suspicion which it has fostered.

In the second case, it reminds us that repentance is not produced by punishment. No one loves the man who makes him suffer, however well-deserved that suffering may be. Doubtless, suffering must be inflicted; it always will be, says Ezekiel, when a wrong has been committed.¹ But this alone is not enough. It is not given to ordinary human beings to kiss the hand that plies the rod. When the rod is laid aside, when the hand is no longer raised to strike, but is held out with gifts upon its palm, then is the moment when love will spring forth to answer love. In that renewing and purifying

¹ Ezekiel 18, 33.

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embrace, sin is at last repudiated and forgiveness can consummate its divine work. The prodigal's forgiveness was complete when, at the sight of his father's open arms, he knew the real meaning of sorrow, not for the hunger he had suffered, but the grief he had caused. It is the goodness of God that leads to repentance.¹

What Paul compressed into a phrase, Ezekiel worked out into a sequence. First, the old environment is changed as completely as in the Europe of to-day; then, God forms His own designs and plans for His people, as we must needs believe He is doing for the nations of the present time. Next, men accept this new ideal and way of life, as we are also beginning in our days to recognise afresh the claims of justice, brotherhood, and the organisation for peace in some august league among the nations. This is followed by a new era of prosperity, of good harvests and good trade, as we should call it; and lastly, as the clouds lift, a deep hatred of the old bad times when the savage law of the jungle, carried out on bourse, in factory, and throughout diplomacy, had brought the world to the verge of ruin.

This is Ezekiel's great word. The prophet is more than the predictor. He is the interpreter of God's mighty rules that hold sway for all time and prove themselves afresh in every age. And having reached this perfect clearness of statement, he turned it, as his way always was, into a picture. It had all sounded too good to be true. The exiles listened to him; but they could not see what he saw. They saw the country lying dead, like a great army of the slain. And what they saw, he saw also.

¹ Romans 24.

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He saw indeed a more terrible vision than theirs ; an army of actual skeletons, bereft of the very form and outward semblance of humanity. But it could not daunt him. Can these dried-up bones return to life ? "Jahve knows." And at the word he is convinced that they will ; he even feels himself, as Jahve's mouthpiece, bidden to summon the four winds, the breath of Jahve Himself, to enter into the bones. Straightway the skeletons become men, clothed in flesh and sinew. Still, they lie motionless and dead. Again the prophet summons the spirit, the breath of Jahve ; and, as in the first moment of creation, when the breath was breathed into the nostrils of the primal man, there is a trembling and a stir, a sudden universal movement, and the hosts stand up upon their feet, rank upon rank, a vast and magnificent army.¹

We make a serious mistake when we read these words as if they referred to some future resurrection of the dead. Ezekiel is thinking of the resurrection of a dead social order, here and now. All Israel's national life, indeed, as far as it is worthy, has its origin in Jahve.² At the moment the nation lies helpless. But the breath of God sweeps over it ; it is alive, capable of all the vivid activities which before were pathetically impossible. As well ask a corpse to bind a sheaf or build a house.

Is this all a dream, a poet's unsubstantial vision ? The breath of God does pass over nations and continents. The spirit (we cannot avoid the term) which animated the Greeks in the struggle against Persia, only a century after Ezekiel set down these words, the awakening of the Arabs under

¹ Ezekiel 37¹⁻¹⁴.

² Ezekiel 34¹, 13¹⁹, 16⁶, 18⁹⁻³², 20^{11, 13, 21}, 33¹¹⁻¹⁶, 37³⁻¹⁴.

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Mohammed, the earlier crusades, and the dawn of the Elizabethan age, are examples of a vital impulse breathed into a whole society. In each of these great epochs, the effects, like the impulses, have been a mixture of good and evil. But can we doubt that the origin was just such a mighty inspiration as Ezekiel here foresees ?

The reader will recollect that in the previous chapter the promise of a new spirit had already been made.¹ But this sublime vision is more than an elaboration of that promise. It is rather the interpretation, from the divine side, of the whole process already set forth. For the whole work ultimately proceeds from Jahve, and is nothing but the effect of the vital giving of Himself, of the most intimate part of Himself, His breath.

After this resurrection of the nation, what is not possible ? The miracle will be the prelude to the fulfilment of the hope most deeply cherished of all. The two divided kingdoms will be united ; one monarch (Ezekiel here allows the suspected word) will rule over both halves of the one people, and in their midst will be the dwelling of Jahve Himself. Ezekiel was no politician in our sense of the word ; he never troubled to ask how the Davidic shepherd of a previous chapter was to do his work ; nor does he ask how the lost Northern tribes are to be collected and restored. Enough for him to know that Israel is ready and fit to receive the crowning mercy ; and therefore it will be vouchsafed.²

These passages are indeed surprising to those who have listened to the stern and pitiless words of the first years of exile. They breathe a sustained and exalted tenderness which, on the lips of Ezekiel,

¹ Ezekiel 36²⁶.

² Ezekiel 37²⁵⁻²⁸.

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impresses us even more than the romantic outpourings of Hosea's affection for his obdurate people. They let us finally into the secret of a nature, steeled against its bent to the mission of rebuke and defiance, and then, at the moment of supreme faith in God, flinging itself forth in love to man.

Such faith and love, to reach their noblest triumphs, must always go together. The world has known many men who have been eager lovers of mankind. But such love will suffer many a sharp repulse and be forced to endure many a burning heartache. Sooner or later, to every philanthropist, men will seem but as the thorn or briar, made only to prick. Inevitably, love would droop and perish, were it not for the strong wings of the faith which calls in the other world of heaven to redress the balance of this world of earth, and which sees in the unbroken progress and the irresistible will of God the pledge that man will rise at last to the perfect stature of Christ.

CHAPTER XII

GOG AND MAGOG

It is never easy to recreate the world of a past age. Every century has taken away something of the mystery that lay around the vast unmapped spaces once surrounding the little oases of civilisation and familiarity. In these days, when those spaces have all been surveyed, even in the desolate regions of the poles, it is almost impossible to imagine the insecurity which men felt when a few days' journey could bring them to the edge of the unknown.

Yet even to-day we know moods in which we can sympathise with the forebodings of our ancestors. We talk with vague uncertainty of the "yellow peril," or wonder what would happen if the millions of Central or Southern Africa were to be armed and let loose upon Europe. At such times we can dimly understand the terrors of the fourth century of our era, when the unknown and savage North was beginning to pour her barbarians across the far-flung but ill-guarded frontiers of the Roman Empire. Such terrors even then were no new thing. From time to time, vast hordes had broken from their hidden recesses and swarmed over the cultivated lands around the Mediterranean, to subside rapidly like some sudden flood; but like the flood, leaving behind them ineffaceable memories of rapine and destruction.

One of the most notable of these invasions was the Scythian incursion which swept over Syria and

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Palestine in Ezekiel's boyhood. It has left few traces in surviving literature, but enough to show the horror of helplessness with which men trembled before those fierce and cruel riders. The damage they actually inflicted was slight. They did not venture into the mountainous centre of the country. But the relief with which their departure was hailed only heightened the recollection of the dreadful possibilities threatened by their advance.¹

One evil memory is apt to drive out another. The troubles that followed the death of Josiah gave the Jews little leisure to recall the breathless days when the Scythians were darkening the maritime plain. But from Ezekiel's impressionable mind the effect of those days was never effaced. Psychologists tell us that a large part of our conscious lives is influenced by fears whose occasions we have almost forgotten ; and that some sudden shock may revive the horror, though not the details, of our far-off childhood. Nothing that Ezekiel has left us would suggest the persistence in his mind of this Scythian " phobe," until the period when he seemed to have reached a serenity of outlook never known before. Then it roused itself, and for a time almost overwhelmed him.

Ezekiel's attainment of a clear and articulate vision of Israel's restoration in body and soul was the complete expression of the third of the three great moods that we have been watching : horror of Israel's evil-doing and rebellion ; exultation over the fate of the nations around her borders ; and confidence in the glorious future that awaited and consummated her penitence. With the attainment of the third of these moods, the first passed away for

¹ See p. 56. Parts of Jer. 43-63^o may refer to this calamity ; cf. C.B. pp. 275f.

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ever. But the second was still able to re-assert itself. The sky which had so beautifully cleared was suddenly overcast with the cloud of a new and terrible possibility. No bigger at first than a man's hand, it threatened a tempest which might sweep away all the precious gains of Israel's conversion and restoration.

We are apt to think of that conversion, the gift of the new spirit or breath, as if it took place solely in the spiritual realm. But Ezekiel could recognise no difference between the spiritual and the actual or political. "Israel is at last"—such was his inner thought—"in peace, without a fear for the future. Assyria, Tyre, Egypt, even Edom, are reduced to helplessness. But is she really safe? Did not that Scythian invasion fall upon us years ago like a bolt from the blue? What of the other hordes beyond the regions we know so well?" Gog, Meshech, Tubal, in the wild mountain lands that we think of to-day as Asia Minor and Armenia—what was there to prevent these breaking loose and destroying all the fair structure of Ezekiel's confident vision? He knew in fact of certain old prophecies which foretold exactly such a calamity.¹

Ezekiel's was not the mind that could lightly throw aside such a suggestion as this. A dream will sometimes recall the experience of some painful or critical hour through which we have passed long before, and in the absence of the self-control habitual to our waking moments, will set us brooding over it and imaginatively prolonging its suffering almost to the breaking point. Within Ezekiel there was always something akin to this dream consciousness. The revived suspense and horror

¹ Ezekiel 38¹⁷.

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which in his boyhood he had shared with the whole community, the sudden thought of the forgotten peoples of the dim North, and the obscure predictions which now came flooding back on his memory, became a nightmare. Another man might have laughed at such remote fears. To Ezekiel it was all far too serious for such a way of escape. It placed his faith in jeopardy.

The menace to his faith, however, proved once more its own undoing. The very magnitude of the danger was an assurance that the danger would be surmounted. The Northern hosts might come, they would come; that was the meaning of those ancient predictions; but they would not get the better of Jahve. If they came, it could only be in order that they might meet their destruction, and so cease for ever to threaten the peace of the restored and unified nation of Israel. Their very mustering was an act of obedience—doubtless of unconscious obedience—to the orders of Jahve. Jahve's wisdom would be their real guide to Palestine, as Jahve's power would destroy them when they reached its defenceless yet divinely protected borders.¹

Foreboding and terror thus change into a pæan of triumph. As in the earlier series of poems on foreign nations, Ezekiel now is far more detached, and far more the artist, than in his former attacks on his own people. Their coming danger does not grip and crush him as did the vision of their past and enduring sin. The danger is indeed to him already surmounted, and he can allow his imagination to play freely around it. Reading the poem sympathetically, one is curiously

¹ Ezekiel 38.

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reminded of Tschaikowsky's 1812 Overture. In that great and moving composition, we hear first the wild echoes of the Marseillaise, the battle cry of the invading hosts of France ; then we listen to the seemingly endless tramping of the legions into the very centre of Russia. At the height of triumph the bells of the Kremlin ring out, turning success in an instant into disaster ; and over the hapless retreat of the French rise the strong and virile tones of Russia's national anthem, the symbol of her faith and spiritual vitality.

In the same manner Ezekiel begins by picturing the gathering of the vast multitude, and leads it into the very midst of Palestine, where there is no warlike power to resist it. He dwells with grim insistence on its advance, as Tschaikowsky piles up the chords which suggest the march of the French armies. Then, in far fewer words, is described its mysterious doom ; and, to crown all, the prophet's faith transforms that doom into the assertion of Jahve's invincible might.

But Ezekiel does not stop here. As admirers of his poetic power, we might wish that he had done so. The subject had aroused his imagination too vigorously. His danger, when this happened, was not, like Wordsworth's, the commonplace and trite. Ezekiel could never be trite. It was the grotesque. He was saved from this, when dealing with Tyre and Egypt, by the profoundly tragic character of their fate. They were great enough to be magnificent, like Macbeth or Othello, even in their fall. But these barbarian riders, like Attila's Huns, had nothing great about them, except their numbers. When these numbers had proved their undoing, internal strife plunging the whole host into

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confusion and mutual slaughter, there was nothing more to be said.

Ezekiel's imagination, however, insists on dwelling on the scene after the invasion had been brought to nothing. He describes the immense stores of military munitions and equipment, now to be used conveniently and economically as firewood by their intended victims ; next, he thinks of the enormous heaps of the corpses ; they will need a special labour corps (to use our modern term) to bury them, and the process will take as long as seven months. This, however, is not purely fantastic ; to the priest, it was necessary that the land should be cleansed, and cleansed thoroughly, from the pollution of the dead bodies of foreigners, if Jahve was to be worshipped there. Then, by a strange and, it must be confessed, a repellent transition of thought, he summons bird and beast, at Jahve's behest, to come and glut themselves at Jahve's table on the flesh of captains and princes and all the mighty men of war !¹

This again is not mere savage triumph, the expression of the mood that gloats over the defeat of the fallen foe, however unknightly. There is something nobler in it all than this. It breathes the same contempt for military prowess that we found in the odes on the fall of Egypt. The armies of Egypt, for all the terror of their weapons, were huddled into the grave. The hosts of Gog lie unburied on the mountain-side, and are food for carrion wolves and kites. As to the manner in which the whole system, based upon sheer force, is brought to nothing Ezekiel is silent. He is not interested in the point. Or rather, he is quite certain about it. It is accomplished by Jahve Himself. Israel has no

¹ Ezekiel 39¹⁻²⁴.

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allies ; none, except the highest and most august of all. His vindication cannot be expressed in terms of military strategy. It cannot indeed be expressed at all. But it is none the less real and effective.

The modern reader hardly knows whether to wonder more at Ezekiel's faith or at his simplicity. When even a League of Nations has to rely for defence upon the "sanction" of large combined navies ; when national aggression must be prevented by the threat of an international boycott ; and when behind industrial agreements stands the military power of the whole state, are we destroying or removing force ? Are we not simply substituting one force for another ? And can we hope to do anything else ?

It may be replied with truth that even by the establishment of such "sanctions" as these much has been done. The question is not really whether force can be answered by anything else than force. The important point to decide is the kind of force that is to be employed. Force is one thing when it is used by the parties to a dispute in order to push their own separate interests ; it is quite another thing when it is used by an authority which is superior to both, to defend a sentence which claims to be judicial. "All government," we are told, "rests upon force." But that force is the force at the disposal of the judge, not of the plaintiff. The real bane of society is not the existence of armies or navies, but the unlimited power to use those armies
1 to enforce a selfish and unsocial ambition.

Still, Ezekiel, even as an interpreter of our modern efforts at reconstruction, was not so far out as he appears. Force can in reality no more drive out force than Satan can drive out Satan. The force

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at the disposal of the judge is not only a restraint, it is also a challenge to the force at the disposal of the would-be law-breaker. If the realm of force in the world has actually grown narrower, if the number of disputes in which an appeal is made to force steadily grows smaller, it is not because of the increasing power of the policeman, or the police state. It is because the spirit of man refuses to recognise force as a remedy ; because in some dim and unformulated fashion, it sees that force and justice have nothing in common ; and that to secure justice two things are necessary : fairness even to the side we do not like, and the resolve to get at the truth, whether we gain by it or lose. And what is this but the influence of that great living principle and centre of justice and mercy which Ezekiel called Jahve ?

True, Ezekiel's faith was simple ; as simple as his conception of the divine ruler of the universe. But if it was simple, it was also profound. It issued in two great convictions : the first, that righteousness and peace are supreme, and march with irresistible footsteps ; however delayed their reign among men, that reign will certainly be set up at the last. The second, that they are the chosen modes of expression of a living and personal power, who uses all the emotions of men, their pride and lust and greed, their misery and penitence, to accomplish their tardy recognition of his majesty and to secure their abiding happiness.

Is such a faith harder now than in the dark days of the prophet ? Unless we refuse to stop at anything short of the " fortuitous concourse of atoms," or prefer to seat a devil on the eternal throne, we must be aware that Ezekiel's is the only attitude

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that can be called reasonable. Matthew Arnold has often been unfairly sneered at for his "power, not ourselves, that makes for righteousness." That power, which must be finally supreme, or it is not worth considering, is the Jahve of the prophets; it is also, when all the implications of its existence have been thought out, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. It only remains that we should order our lives as if such a power really did exist. That is the faith that overcomes the world; and how few there be that find it.

In this way, the last dread possibility of disorder, in Ezekiel's view, was overcome. The accumulated lawlessness of the world was flung across the hillsides of Palestine in ruin. As Ezekiel gazed upon the carnage, his thought took another quick and subtle turn. "Now at last," he says, "the world will be unable to misinterpret Israel's fall. With such a sign of Jahve's power before their eyes, they cannot attribute her fate to her protector's weakness, but only to her own rebellion."¹

The words fall strangely on our ears at the close of so confident a vision of deliverance. But deliverance is impossible apart from the victims' understanding of the yoke from which they have been delivered. And in his concluding lines Ezekiel reverts to the pivot of his thought, the majestic process of which the destruction of the hosts of Gog is the final stage; the turning again of Israel's captivity; the uprush of her shame and penitence; the outpouring of the new spirit upon her; her recognition of her Saviour, and her unbroken prosperity and peace beneath His mild and magnificent rule.

¹ Ezekiel 39^{25ff.}

CHAPTER XIII

THE TEMPLE AND THE LAW

WITH the triumphant completion of his great "invasion symphony," Ezekiel's work might seem to be complete. He had mapped out the whole course of Israel's restoration, from the misery of exile to the assurance of safety, righteousness and peace. The reader might well imagine that there was nothing more to say.

But Ezekiel was a priest. That was the first and the only thing he tells us about himself. In all his work so far, his priestly interests had been in abeyance. He had other things to think about. The whole national existence was at stake; and he could no more spend time or thought, at such a crisis, on the minutiae of ritual than he could offer sacrifices or inspect sacrificial victims on the alien soil of exile.

This inability, along with his absorption in what had hitherto been the main concern of the prophets, contributed greatly to his loneliness. The other members of his order felt something that separated him from themselves. Why this perpetual insistence on Israel's rebellion and the necessity for a change of heart? True, one could not carry on the Temple worship, just as one could not sing the songs of Jahve, in a foreign land.¹ But surely, when the exile came to an end, the Temple could

¹ Psalm 137⁴

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be rebuilt, the sacrifices could be renewed, and all would be well.

This is the sacerdotal contention; the same contention which in these days would persuade people that if they will only "make their communion" regularly, God will demand nothing more from them. Ezekiel had drunk far too deeply of the prophetic spirit to be misled by such an error as this. But he differed from the other prophets as he differed from the priests. There was something in his nature which is to be found in none of his prophetic predecessors; a combination of passionateness with a sense of order and of logical sequence. Not that the prophets were not interested in ritual. In particular, Hosea's constant references to the debased ritual of his time show how keenly he missed a more spiritual cultus. But the prophets had no considered view of ritual. Hence, while they painted pictures, he was working out a programme and a scheme.

He also differed from them because he was a priest, and one who, unlike Jeremiah, had never cut himself off from his class. He had never ceased to be interested in ritual observances. In fact, he never recognised the difference between the ritual and the moral.¹ Freedom from material pollution and ceremonial holiness were as important to him as honesty of spirit and singleness of mind. The one was in fact impossible without the other. To "get right with God," indeed, involved a progression marked by something of the leisureliness of the solemn observances of the Temple.

In his profound scheme of reconstruction, the priest had been at work as well as the prophet. He

¹ Ezekiel 185-9. Contrast Jer. 7²².

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had never supposed that ordinances could replace repentance. He had never materialised the gracious and forgiving activity of Jahve into an *opus operatum*, independent of the moral fitness alike of the minister and the recipient.¹ Restoration could not be built up on some act that had been or might be performed, either by Jahve Himself, His priests, or His people. From the weakness of sacerdotalism he was altogether emancipated. But he knew and valued its strength. Repentance, like worship, must be a thing of definite stages, a progress from the outer court to the inner, a passing from the holy to the holiest, a solemn procession to the immediate presence of God.

In such a mind as Ezekiel's, interest in concrete ritual observances might be pushed for a time on one side; it could never be obliterated. Like the memories of the Scythian invasion, it would force its way to the front sooner or later. In the long, pitilessly hot days of lower Mesopotamia, when all movement was a burden and one could only sigh for the cool of the evening, the thoughts of the exiled priest would turn naturally to the white and breezy courts of the Temple, where, high above sea-level, at sun-rise or sun-set, the familiar sacrifices had spoken to him of the comfort of Jahve's unfailing holiness. No wonder that he found himself at last brooding over every well-remembered detail of the ritual, dwelling on its beauty, and pondering over changes that might make its protection and purity still more secure.

This suggestion of changes comes on us, perhaps, as strange. We are accustomed to think of law, and especially of the Hebrew ritual law, as something

¹ See Bartlett and Carlyle, "Christianity in History," pp. 455f.

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fixed and unalterable. The reverse is the truth. The most striking and important thing about the Hebrew law was its capacity to alter and develop. This is more or less true, indeed, of every kind of law. Law, whether ritual or civil, originates in custom; and customs change. These changes are slow, but they are real, and can be observed even among barbarous tribes where progress seems unknown. As soon as a tribe finds itself in an altering environment, or where there are new possibilities of intercourse with other tribes, or still more with a higher civilisation, the rate of change inevitably quickens; and when, as happens sooner or later in the progress towards civilisation, customs are written down and harden into laws, the laws, even if graven on stone, are far from being petrified. They must change with the changing circumstances of the people who made them.

We need not delay by turning to find examples in the steady growth of the codes of ancient Greece and Rome, or in the development of our own English Common Law. New occasions and new precedents are constantly modifying and expanding the old simplicity of time-honoured practices. It will be enough to keep our attention fixed on Israel. No nation could experience greater changes than the transformation, at the entrance into the Promised Land, from a loosely-bound collection of nomad shepherds, like the Bedouin of the desert, into an organised community of farmers and smallholders, forced at every turn to fight in its own defence; and the further transformation of these farmers, each with the love of independence strong in his mind, into the subjects of an oriental monarchy, where commerce brought new luxuries into the

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country-side, and where attempts at despotism were varied by intrigue and assassination.

Changes in religion as well as in social practice were inevitable, and they took the very direction that was to be expected. As the population settled down and their command over the resources of the country increased, the rudeness natural to the simple life and worship of the desert disappeared; services and offerings became more elaborate; festivals and pilgrimages to sacred shrines were better organised, and the priesthood became a recognised and influential class in the state. When the kings turned the shrines at Jerusalem and Bethel into royal chapels, the guardianship of the shrines grew more important and the privileges and duties of the officiating priests more impressive. Ritual developed precisely as it has developed in the different branches of the Christian Church. To compare the account given of the sacrifices in the earlier code in Exodus and the later code of the period after the exile suggests a comparison between the Eucharist as described in the Didache or in Justin Martyr and High Mass at St. Mark's in Venice or St. Peter's at Rome, or between the celebration of the Lord's Supper in a nonconformist chapel and a ritualistic Anglican church.¹ Sacrifices were an essential expression of Israelite piety. The ceremonial which accompanied them might be as various as the motives and expectations with which the victims were brought to the shrine.

Such changes have taken place on a far wider scale in the Christian than in the Jewish Church,

¹ E.g., contrast Exodus 24 with Lev. 17¹⁻⁹, Exodus 23¹⁴⁻¹⁷ with Numbers 28, 29; see C.B., pp. 27f. See also Frere, W. H., "Principles of Religious Ceremonial," chaps. 4, 5, 6.

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but in neither have they been universally approved. Reformations have been carried through with regard to ritual as well as creeds. Such a reformation took place, as we have seen already, in the reign of Josiah, before Ezekiel was old enough to know anything about it. Nearly a century before, a code containing various drastic changes had been drawn up,¹ and its demands had been partially embodied in the reforms carried out by the reigning monarch, Hezekiah.² But Hezekiah, like many other practical and responsible authorities, had shrunk from going the whole way with the enthusiasts, and in the reaction that followed under his successor, Manasseh, the code was lost and forgotten.³ Under Josiah this code, or something like it, though perhaps more advanced, had been re-discovered and put into operation in its entirety.⁴ Its most striking innovation was the abolition of every centre for public worship in the country save the Temple at Jerusalem. But there were many other changes, not without their importance to the priestly administrator of the ritual. In other matters, the code, like other codes, was content to set down in writing what had gradually been coming to be the established practice, and through it all there breathed a gentleness and piety which suggest that the reformers mingled the sternness of Calvin with the kindly simplicity of Luther.

No reformation has ever fulfilled all the hopes of the reformers. The reformation of Josiah, on the face of it, was a disastrous failure. Under Josiah's successors the worst kinds of heathenism had

¹ Its provisions are probably to be found embedded in Deut. 12-25.

² 2 Kings 184.

³ 2 Kings 213-7.

⁴ 2 Kings 234-20; see p. 40.

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invaded the cleansed and purified Temple courts and, forty years after the great change, the Temple itself was a mass of filthy ruins. In the face of such a disappointment an earnest and religious priest might have been pardoned if he had given way to despair. But Ezekiel did not despair. There had been a time when the hideous corruption of the worship in the Temple had prevented him from seeing anything beyond its coming destruction. Now that the destruction had actually come, he saw more clearly, both before and behind. In the very teeth of all political probabilities he began to dwell on the vision of a reformed worship on the time-honoured spot, so hallowed and so dishonoured ; and he also began to recall those purer and more beautiful aspects of the worship, and the temple structure itself, to which his passionate indignation had once made him blind. For a reformer in exile, to innovate was to conserve.

In these projects of reconstruction, Ezekiel found that he was no longer alone. After a dozen years of solitary protest, he was destined at last to know the joys of companionship. Among the exiles in his neighbourhood was a group of priests, who like Ezekiel himself had refused to despair of the worship of Jahve. They knew, as clearly as Ezekiel, that the desperate remedy of the extirpation of all public worship from the country except in Jerusalem had been unable to save the cause of true religion. They felt the insidious perils of idolatry. And they set themselves to erect further barriers against its approach. The marvel is that there were other people besides Ezekiel among the exiles who thought it worth while to draw up directions for worship, in a Temple which was non-existent, by a body of

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worshippers who had no prospect of ever coming within hundreds of miles of its desolate site.¹

It was natural that Ezekiel and the members of this daring group should draw together. Little as they may have understood his prediction of the fate of the capital in earlier years, or sympathised with his echoes of the prophetic ideals of Jeremiah, he and they were at one in their view of the needs of the future. Some of them had first been arrested by his original interpretations of Jahve's will, when, with other of the leading men of the community, they had gathered in his house.² Now they spent long hours together, sharing their hopes and fears, discussing how much of the old might be restored in the future and how much must be destroyed. Naturally, too, the power and originality of a master mind like Ezekiel's had a deep influence in all their discussions; but it would have puzzled them to decide how much of the results at which they arrived were due to him, and how much to their common thought. And we have seen enough of the working of Ezekiel's mind to know that it could receive as readily as it could give out.³

At all events, these eager priests shared one dominant conviction. The antiseptic of all worship is holiness. We must pause for a moment on this word; for though much has been written about its special significance for Hebrew life, its use is so different and yet so common in our religious language that misconception is almost unavoidable. To understand it, however, we have but to go behind

¹ This code, known as H (Holiness Code) is found in Lev. 17-26.

² Ezekiel 8¹, 14¹, 20¹, 23.

³ Ezekiel 11³, 12²², 24¹⁹, etc., and p. 100. For this group of priestly reformers compare C.B., pp. 30f.

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one very familiar distinction, the distinction between the material and the spiritual; the distinction, as we might say, between the sacred vessel and the purpose for which it is employed. To us the cleanliness of the vessel is one thing, a matter of soap and water; the rightness of the purpose is another, a matter of the humble and believing heart. To the Jew the cleanliness of the vessel was not simply a matter of soap and water. It might be unclean when no dirt was visible to the naked eye, but when it had been touched by some "unclean" person, a foreigner or someone who had been in contact with a corpse. In the same way a communion cup might now be felt to be unclean if it had touched a tuberculous or venereally diseased lip. In that case, to the Hebrew mind it could only be "sterilised" by careful and complicated ceremonies.

Similarly, the purpose was not simply a matter of the humble heart. If some act of disobedience or even unintentional neglect had hindered the free access of the worshippers to Jahve, that access could not be restored (so the Hebrew law laid it down) simply by an act of penitence or regret. Certain elaborate ceremonies, to mark the return to the ritually pure society of worshippers, must also be performed, or Jahve would continue to shrink back as He would shrink back (so He was represented), in a kind of physical disgust, from a dirty cup or an unclean animal brought to His sacrificial altar.

In other words, holiness is a quality, neither purely physical nor purely spiritual, which must be possessed by every person and every thing brought in worship into Jahve's presence. It is lost by any of the various kinds of prohibited contact or

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employment : and a sincere and genuine desire to restore it can only be fulfilled by means of a definite and prescribed ceremonial, varying with the different objects and persons to be cleansed. These prohibitions have often been compared with the taboos of primitive religion. In many of them the original reason for the prohibition has been as completely forgotten as in the hoariest and most obscure taboo. But in this aspect, as in so many others, Israel touches the lowest and the highest strata of human religion. If some of the acts forbidden to Israel reappear in savage practices spread over two hemispheres, the prohibition of others shows a passionate regard for undisturbed communion with God, a "sensibility to sin," worthy of a Christian saint.

It must also be remembered that holiness is a wider term than ritual cleanliness. Like cleanliness, it is really negative, describing the absence of the quality or the contagion that prevents valid approach to Jahve in worship. It also denotes positive fitness and readiness for religious intercourse, a fitness which comes to be felt to include humility, purity, obedience, confidence, and love. And it is a quality which is not only necessary for all true worshippers ; it is possessed by Jahve Himself ; a subtle and communicable influence, shared by Jahve and, in varying degrees, by persons, places or material objects which were regarded as being or meant to be in contact with Him and which needed therefore to be carefully protected from anything by which that influence would be neutralised or destroyed. To bring the unholy into the presence of the holy is either to make it holy itself or to cause some disaster.¹ Israel's progress in

¹ Ezekiel 44¹⁹ C.B. ; 2 Samuel 67.

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religion can be tested by the de-materialising of this conception of holiness.

All Hebrew reforms were met sooner or later by one great difficulty. Embedded in Hebrew traditional custom was a mass of practices which could only be called pagan. Indeed, the history of Hebrew religion as a whole is the superseding of pagan beliefs by the worship of a single invisible and moral god, Jahve. These practices kept the door open for purely pagan ideas to re-enter. The very taboos and purification ceremonies often suggested the agency of inferior gods, non-moral nature powers and demons. Should such practices be forbidden? If so, the popular veneration for them might prove too strong for the prestige of the reforms. Later groups of reformers, like most men in their position, took a middle path. They decided in many cases to retain and embody the customs, alien as these might be to their own fundamental convictions, while carefully eliminating the too obvious traces of pagan superstition. The most conspicuous example of this compromise is the ceremonial of the two goats on the day of Atonement.¹ We might also refer to the curious provision for the purification of a house or a garment from the taint of leprosy.² They thus preserved customs far older than the time of Moses, and unmentioned in earlier and less comprehensive codes; and in so doing they have suggested to later times a symbolism which would occur neither to them nor to those whose allegiance they were successful in securing.

Our group of reformers, however, was for the most part entirely uninterested in such compro-

¹ Lev. 163.

² Lev. 1347ff., 1434ff.

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mises. They preferred to set down the sternest prohibitions of any customs that [showed affinities with pagan cults.¹ Ezekiel was heartily at one with them in this respect, and in the account which he eventually wrote of his own vision of the future, many of their thorough-going provisions appear almost word for word.²

But on another point, to which they were inclined to pay little attention, he felt supreme interest. This was the fabric of the Temple itself. To the working priest, if we may use the term, the details of the Temple structure did not greatly matter. So long as he had an altar at which to minister, and a shrine to enter when called upon to do so, he was content. When Ahaz had a new altar of a Syrian pattern installed in the Temple, no objection was raised by the priests.³ The code prepared by Ezekiel's friends was so occupied with ritual and moral purity that it could have been carried out at the old local shrines without violating one of its expressions.⁴ But Ezekiel felt that purity of worship and suitability of the place of worship must go together. For him, the centralisation of worship at the Temple was a thing beyond all question. On the other hand, the Temple must be fit for this great privilege. In the old days, his criticism of Temple idolatry had cut far more deeply than that of his friends. It was not confined to the worshippers and the ritual. It affected the structural arrangements of the Temple itself. The "chambers of imagery"

¹ See especially Lev. 19.

² See C.B. pp. 30f, and Ezekiel 44^{20,22,23}, 45^{10,12,23,25}, 46¹⁷ C.B.

³ 2 Kings 16^{10ff}.

⁴ This is true, as far as language goes, even of Lev. 17¹⁻¹⁰ and 24¹⁻⁹.

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and the chapel where the women wept for Tammuz¹ would have been in a properly constructed building an impossibility. Equally impossible should it have been to introduce the polluting presence of foreigners as Temple police, or to allow laymen where the more holy persons of priests could alone avoid contamination.²

Ezekiel thus found himself involved not only in ritual but in architectural interests. At the close of some long and careful discussion on cultus—which of the traditional customs should be selected for preservation in the future, what modifications could best ensure the worshippers' regard for the genuine holiness demanded by Jahve—Ezekiel would turn aside to recall his memories of open space, turret and corridor in the Temple itself, and dream of a building in which holiness might be, as it were, solidified into stone and marble.

In these discussions and plans, entire years slipped away, years in which he was too pre-occupied by his new tasks to make any addition worth preserving to the last great discourses on the reviving spirit and the deliverance from the barbarians. Then, after twenty-five years of exile, and twenty years after the overwhelming experiences of his call to prophecy, he saw before him what for so long he had been brooding over in his mind. No other word can be used. "Everywhere he fixes the matter in his eye; he sees it; his heart now and then is as if struck by the greatness of it."³ So Carlyle describes the conviction of the prophet. But Ezekiel's visions were more than this; nor did he

¹ Ezekiel 8ff.

² Ezekiel 44^{7,8} and Jer. 38^{7ff}.

³ Carlyle, "Heroes" (The Hero as Prophet).

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ever confuse what was said to him by Jahve with what was shown him by the angel.

His own account is that the hand of Jahve was on him,¹ and in a divinely inspired vision he saw a lofty mountain in Israel, and a temple built on its summit. This is his way of describing what the modern psychologist would call a trance. Its contents are far too elaborate to allow us to think that he is describing a normal dream. And his insistence on the fact that a heavenly messenger, "a man whose appearance was like brass,"² showed him one detail after another in order, precludes the suggestion that he was consciously working out his own thoughts. The truth is that in this extraordinary vision of the Temple, Ezekiel once more passes over the threshold from the conscious to the sub-conscious. What he had previously pondered over he now beholds with an abnormal fulness of detail and precision of memory. His experience was much more than a dream, yet in his account of it there is an insistence, familiar to us in dreams, on certain minutiae, as if they had been specially noticed, and an entire neglect of others, equally necessary to an intelligible conception of what he had seen; sudden transitions from one view-point or one object of interest to another, and even that triumph over the limitations of space which makes the recollection of our own dreams so fascinating and so bewildering.³

So much may be said by way of accounting for obscurities in Ezekiel's vision which have puzzled the most careful students; but on the other hand, no one can fail to notice the business-like care with which the seer, who has his own reasons for noting

¹ Ezekiel 40^{1,2}.

² Ezekiel 40³.

³ See note on p. 193.

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this or neglecting that, sets down all that he deems important, as if he were working with a plan or a diagram.

There is, however, another aspect of the trance character of Ezekiel's description which is of greater interest, and indeed gives rise to what is for us modern readers the chief importance of this part of Ezekiel's work. It is a wearisome business to work through the complicated measurements of court, alley, gate-house and the rest, on which Ezekiel is so precise. What can it matter whether the height of the enclosing wall measured ten feet or twelve, or whether the porches contained three cells on each side or four? The whole thing seems an example of misplaced and perverse industry. Ezekiel himself gives us no clue to the reason for the insertion of these details or to their origin. But the latter, at least, is not really far to seek. We are all familiar with the strange fashion in which a dream will make use of our previous waking experiences, while altering their character and their connections according to some arbitrary plan of its own. Ezekiel's vision acted, up to a point, in a similar manner. It built itself up on Ezekiel's memories of the actual Temple of Solomon, in whose services the priest had so often taken his part in his youth.¹ The general plan of the visionary building is much too close to that of the edifice which Nebuchadnezzar's troops destroyed to suggest anything but conscious reproduction.

This conservatism has involved the prophet in a curious inconsistency. He dreads the

¹ For suggestions as to the general appearance of Ezekiel's Temple see C.B., pp. 300f, 311f; also, for Solomon's Temple, MacCunn, T., "The Holy Land," plan on p. 88f. Also Toy's Ezekiel, opp. pp. 70, 72.

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presence of the foreigner in the Temple precincts.¹ It is to be the complete expression of holiness. Yet its plan is based on the works of a Phœnician architect and Phœnician craftsmen and builders. Two of the most prominent objects in Solomon's Temple, reproduced in Ezekiel's vision, were the "masseboth" or "pillars," "Jachin" and "Boaz," which would remind every beholder of the universal characteristics of Canaanite worship. The very site of the Temple was the heathen sanctuary of the Jebusites.²

If a student of primitive religion could have found ethnic characteristics in Ezekiel's building, the most casual of Hebrew visitors would have noticed much that was absent from its prototype. Ezekiel's innovations are, however, by no means capricious or wayward, like the novelties of our dreams. They are all dictated by two desires, the desire for symmetry, and the desire to secure adequate official oversight and control of what went on inside and around the sacred building.³ The first arose from a deep-rooted characteristic of the priest's mind, his love of order, harmony, uniformity. It can be seen in the method in which he works out the leading arguments in his discourses, in the balanced arrangement which he has preserved in his book. The second arose in that equally

¹ See above, pp. 51, 54.

² For an example of the persistent influence of pagan ideas, compare the extreme care with which Ezekiel describes the entrances to the Temple (40⁵⁻¹⁶) with the existence of the three functionaries known as "keepers of the door" in Solomon's Temple (2 Kings 12⁹, 22⁴, 23⁴, 25¹⁸; Jer. 35⁴, 52²⁴) and the long-lived superstition connected with the act of crossing the threshold of an important building. (See Frazer, "Folklore in the Old Testament," Vol. III., pp. 11.

³ E.g., the whole plan of the building is worked out in squares; see plan A in C.B. For oversight, cf. the gates to both outer and inner Courts (40^{6,28}) the priests' chambers (40⁴⁴) and the "separate place" (41¹⁰).

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deep-rooted passion for holiness which, as we have seen, formed the basis of his conception of acceptable worship. These considerations give the vision its real significance. They show it was shaped according to psychological laws which are exemplified in our own dreams, though with results as impressive as the matter of our own dreams is flimsy. They also emphasise the character of Ezekiel's first piece of direct reconstruction.

He was not a great creative artist. Probably he did not give a moment's thought to the æsthetic qualities of his edifice. He did not even attempt to describe the general impression it made on him. Possibly this was because it did not make any such impression on him at all. Nor was he in any true sense an innovator. The talents of an Abbé Sièyes would have aroused no envy in him. A comparison of the two temples, the destroyed and the imaginary, makes it clear that he desired the minimum, not the maximum, of change. When he went on to describe the altar, we see him faithful to the same principle.¹ Nowhere is there alteration for alteration's sake, nowhere does he give his inventive faculty (if he is allowed to possess such a thing) a free rein. On the contrary, caprice and arbitrariness were the very things he was determined to avoid. Every building and every measurement were to be the embodiment and expression of order and harmony. When he goes into special detail, as in the curious minuteness of the six "gate-houses," it is simply the result of his anxiety to secure supervision for the holiness of the place; when he describes in impressive language the opening and

¹ Ezekiel 43¹³⁻¹⁷ C.B. This altar may have reproduced the features of the Damascus altar (2 Kings 16¹¹).

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closing of the great gates, it is to emphasise that presence of Jahve which is the reward of the holiness of the place and the people.¹

Evidences of the same resolve meet us when we pass to the directions for the sacrifices, the priests, and their duties to the people. There is alteration when there is danger. That danger is the possibility of soiling the holiness of the Temple precincts and the persons within them by some breach of the divinely ordered ceremonial. All the prohibitions are directed to the avoidance of this disaster. And alteration goes only far enough to ensure that by the new arrangement such a breach is made as difficult and unlikely as possible. We may doubtless perceive the same caution in the absence of the use of wine (a distinctively Canaanite product) in the sacrifices, and of all gold ornamentation on the Temple walls. Now and then, it is true, the clue seems to fail us. This is the case with the offerings at the sacrifices. They are more expensive, for the most part, than under the Deuteronomic code;² and they are less so than a century after the return from the exile. But some clear directions had to be given, if there were to be sacrifices at all; and what could be more natural than that Ezekiel should have inserted the sacrificial provisions that had been worked out at the conferences of the priestly reformers?

We may be spared the task of going into these minutiae ourselves. Ezekiel doubtless regarded them as final. Were they not revealed to him by the messenger of Jahve? But the process of development did not end with Ezekiel and his friends. For us the whole system of Hebrew ritual has been

¹ Ezekiel 44^{1,2}, 46¹.

² Ezekiel 45¹⁻¹⁵ C.B.

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superseded by the ritual—sadly neglected, as it must be confessed—of “visiting the widow and fatherless in their affliction and keeping oneself unspotted from the world.” In a later chapter we shall attempt to estimate the value to posterity of Ezekiel’s fundamental reconstructive principle of holiness. Here it is enough to observe his method, and to reflect that it has generally proved sound. The wisest social reconstruction does not start out with the audacious adventurousness of Sir Thomas More; it is content, with Ezekiel, to be less spectacular; to fix upon some great and dominating principle of social and religious well-being, and then so to adapt existing conditions that, in relation to that guiding thread, it is hard to go wrong, and easy to do right.¹

1. Did Ezekiel write down his visions as soon as they were seen? For the practice of the Apocalyptist, see R. H. Charles, *Studies in the Apocalypse*, p. 110.

It is interesting to notice, in connection with Ezekiel 40ff, an inscription of Gudea (c. 3,000 B.C.), in which he is commanded by a divine person, seen in a vision, to build a temple: the ground-plan of this is then shown to him. Statues of Gudea, representing him as holding such a ground-plan in his hand, have been discovered (*Zeitschrift für Assyriologie* xiv.).

CHAPTER XIV

THE STATE AND THE LAND

In the preceding chapter we have been guilty of some over-simplification of Ezekiel's life and thought. We have spoken as if, in the long months previous to his great vision of the Temple in 572 B.C., he had simply been occupied with matters of Temple ritual and sacerdotal function. As a matter of fact, his thoughts had taken a far wider range. They had moved over the whole sphere of social and national life. They had even busied themselves with the advantages and drawbacks of the physical configuration of the country.

In consequence, his concluding vision was a much more surprising thing than the last chapter has suggested. It was not merely a sub-normal or super-normal synthesis of his thoughts on temple and ritual reconstruction. It passed into a commanding illumination of the whole fabric of the state. He sees the Temple crowning the mountain of Jahve; he passes through its courts; he watches the service of its great altar. Then he is instructed as to the financial status and privileges of the new civil chief magistrate, and the new distribution of the tribes in the country; he sees the appearance of a new river, irrigating and transforming the barren hills of the South, and turning the Dead Sea into a tropical lake, its banks covered with

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a luxuriant growth and its waters teeming with fish ; and he is given, like Moses, a Pisgah sight of the distant boundaries of the state. Lastly, the city is surrounded by an extensive glebe, which becomes the economic and social centre of the country.

Was this all the result of some exalted moment of vision ? Against such a supposition it may be urged that the detailed arrangements suggest long and careful deliberation ; and, further, that having begun by describing a vision, the prophet continued to use language appropriate to such a vision though he was really dealing with a vision no longer. The truth is probably less simple. That long consideration had gone to produce in his mind the conception of changes which were absolutely essential to the new national life, is clear enough. On the other hand, there is a distinct difficulty in supposing that, as in the case of the Temple, these changes suddenly took shape in what our modern psychological terminology calls a trance. And indeed, the new dimensions assigned to the city, the re-allocating of land to the tribes, and more particularly the course of the sacred river, are so glaringly in defiance of actual topography—a topography far more familiar to Ezekiel, it must be remembered, than to us—that in his waking and normal moments he could hardly have contemplated so grotesque a transformation. It would be foolish to dogmatise. We cannot put Ezekiel into the witness box and cross-question him. If we could, he would probably be unable to satisfy us. It may well have been that in setting down his trance experiences, he rounded off and filled out the new constitution. It is not easy for us to distinguish between the real and the

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fancied memories of our dreams. The fact remains that in spite of the deliberate defiance of natural conditions which it contains, we have a clear and coherent, though of course a partial, scheme for a society which for the first time in history was to be a complete embodiment of holiness.

In these arrangements, to which we now turn, we find a new principle at work. The leading considerations are economic rather than structural and liturgical. These naturally include something more than safeguards against carelessness and pollution. In the first place, provision is made for the incomes of the priests. These are to be raised, partly from the priests' share of the continuous and regular offerings in the Temple, partly from the estates now assigned to the priestly college.¹ Curiously enough, Ezekiel is entirely silent on the subject of the high priest, an official who appears in the code of his friends,² and whose position in Jerusalem after the return from exile was increasingly important. To estimate the character of these endowments we must compare them with the incomes which the priests had hitherto enjoyed. Unfortunately, we are not familiar with these, nor is Ezekiel's language free from ambiguity. Two things, however, are clear; in place of the haphazard charity which had hitherto been the support of the Levites, definite sources of income are assigned to them. Also, the general scale of endowment is increased. The change from the voluntary to the compulsory is a constant accompaniment of advance in social organisation. It was embodied in the great Poor Law of Elizabeth; and the last few years have seen an increasing tendency for the State or the

¹ Ezekiel 44²⁸⁻³⁰, 45^{4,5} C.B.

² Lev. 21¹⁰.

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Municipality to take over institutions which have originated in private endeavour: hostels, nursery schools, school clinics, garden cities, and the like.

In the second place, Ezekiel is not simply providing for the comfort or luxury of his own order. He is securing their independence. Previously, that independence had been constantly threatened. When the priests were largely supported from the private revenues of the king's religious establishment, they could hardly protest against unwarrantable demands from their patrons. In Israel, again, the priests had always been judges; and for judges to be in the position of court officials constituted the gravest of public dangers.¹ Other prophets had protested against venality in the law courts and avarice in the Temple. Ezekiel came to the conclusion that protests and appeals were of little use. A different method must be taken to redress grievances. The temptations to wrong-doing must be removed. Secure to a man as much as he can legitimately desire, and he will not have recourse to fraud and violence. The axiom does not sound over-complimentary to human nature; but it is the plan which our own country has found it wise to follow, alike with our judges, our policemen, and, it might be added, our members of Parliament; and all history has shown that under-payment and irregular payment are two of the most serious causes of agitation and disorder. Nor is the principle so cynical as it might be thought. It rests on the fact that avarice and greed are not inseparable from human nature; that where justice is done it will be recognised and respected. If Ezekiel is right he

¹ Ezekiel 44²⁴ C.B. 1 Sam. 22⁵ suggests that in very early times the priests were employed as arbitrators. See also Ezekiel 22¹⁰; Deut. 33¹⁰; Mal. 2¹⁻⁶.

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has taken us some way into the mysteries of human psychology and social stability.

It is something to have discovered a principle of statecraft whose neglect is responsible for disorder in institutions so far removed from one another as the Turkish Janissaries and Tammany Hall. But Ezekiel did more than this. He was making the first attempt at a written ecclesiastical constitution. With Israel, as in most other countries, the economic status of the priesthood begins in local usages ; and the authority of these local usages shows great powers of persistence. The usages themselves may vary considerably from time to time. In Palestine, the industrial and economic changes, from the early monarchy onwards, had brought the organisation of ecclesiastical revenues into confusion. After the reformation of Josiah, which disestablished a large and certainly not uninfluential portion of the clergy, the confusion was increased. It was clear that in the event of a return from exile, the field for disputes would be enormous. In the general scarcity, which was all that could be expected at first, the priests would naturally desire to secure all that was possible in the way of dues ; the public would as naturally be anxious to have the benefit of religious ministrations as cheaply as they could be obtained. The old quarrels which had disgraced the shrine at Shiloh in Eli's time would be renewed on a far larger scale, with the worst results for religious propriety and even social order.¹ Ezekiel may well have been mistaken in what he thought the priests would be justified in claiming ; we have not the necessary material to criticise him, nor had he the facts essential to a decision for what was

¹ 1 Sam. 2¹²⁻¹⁶.

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still in the distant future. But at least he saw that the matter could not be left to chance and the wavering fortunes of a struggle that would embitter both sets of disputants. When the return from exile had taken place it was found necessary to raise the dues still higher.¹

The same conviction, that no exhortations to self-denial can take the place of definite financial provisions, controls the prophet's directions for the estate of the prince. Who this prince is, and how he is to be appointed, Ezekiel does not trouble to say. Was he to be a descendant of the royal Davidic house, like Zerubbabel, the actual leader of the returning Jews, but with functions as much less imposing as was his new title? Ezekiel indeed had no love for the word "King."² Unlike most of the Jerusalem priesthood, he was no royalist. His sympathies lay with the old-fashioned theocratic school, which felt that human royalty was an encroachment on Jahve's prerogatives in Israel.³ But the "prince" appears suddenly, and, so to speak, unannounced, as new characters sometimes step out into prominence from the background of a dream.⁴ At all events, he is clearly the supreme civil authority of the restored state, and if we ask whether he was the military authority as well, Ezekiel would reply that with the downfall of all foreign military powers, an army would be wholly unnecessary.

With regard to the prince, in fact, Ezekiel goes at once to what was for an Oriental the point of real

¹ Contrast Ezekiel 44³⁰ with Numbers 18^{12,13} C.B. Compare also the domain of the Levites in Ezekiel 44⁵ (a new thing at that time) with their forty-eight cities in Numbers 35⁷.

² See p. 62 and Ezekiel 34²⁴.

³ 1 Sam. 10^{17ff}; cf. Deut. 17¹⁴⁻²⁰.

⁴ Ezekiel 45⁷.

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importance. The Eastern world has never known the security of settled taxes and revenues. For generation after generation the peasants of Anatolia and Mesopotamia have watered and tilled their fields, and their military masters have swept down and taken what they could of the produce. The rule that it is never wise to be thought to be rich lest the tax-gatherer should raise his demands, is known from the Balkans (before 1912) to the Tigris. To have made this wisdom unnecessary is one of the great though little understood blessings of the British Raj in India. Palestine, in this respect, was a thoroughly Oriental country.¹ The "good" authority is the authority which does not take bribes from the rich and grind the face of the poor. Ezekiel attacked the problem of the prince exactly as he had attacked the problem of the judges. His "civil list" was to be fixed, and at a reasonable amount.² He would then have no excuse for extortion. There was to be no farming of the taxes. The prince's estate was to be entailed. It was not to be diminished by grants to dependants or favourites—grants which would then have to be made up by fresh raids on the patrimony of the citizens.³ The amount of his gift to the Temple and its sacrifices was also prescribed.⁴ Even the plea of piety, as an excuse for rapacity, was denied to him. Everyone knew what he was expected to give, and knew that he could afford it. Ezekiel was no Gelasius or Hildebrand, to delimit the spheres of the spiritual and temporal powers in human society. Had his interests been more definitely political, he might have anticipated Calvin's

¹ 1 Sam. 8¹⁴⁻¹⁷.

³ Ezekiel 46¹⁶⁻¹⁸.

² Ezekiel 45⁷⁻⁹.

⁴ Ezekiel 45²⁷.

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Geneva in Jerusalem ; as it was, he was more anxious to restrain "abuses," like the barons who wrung the great charter from the reluctant hands of John.

Another safeguard was in the prophet's mind, though, except for an allusion,¹ he has given it no expression in his writings. This was the old Hebrew custom that in a given year, the "year of liberty," as Ezekiel calls it, all property should revert to the original owners. The friends with whom he had discussed these matters, however, gave this institution special prominence in their code ; the care with which it is described in the later legislation shows that it long remained an ideal of the priestly reformers.² Whether this law of reversion was ever anything more than an ideal cannot be said ; but the idea which underlay it would make it seem quite reasonable to the Hebrew mind. The one true owner of all the land was Jahve. He distributes His estates to each family by lot.³ He could even ordain that resident aliens should be treated like genuine Israelites.⁴ We may compare with this principle the similar custom (though this, too, was not carried out regularly) which restored to all Hebrew slaves their liberty every seventh year.⁵

Even this does not exhaust the prophet's safeguards. "There has been enough cheating and cozening," he cries, "in the evil past. Let us have honesty and plain dealing in the future." Amos or Isaiah might have said the same thing.⁶ But Ezekiel does not stop there. He actually proceeds to fix the most important elements in the scale of

¹ Ezekiel 46¹⁷, C.B.

² Lev. 25¹⁰, 27²⁴; Numbers 36¹.

³ Ezekiel 45¹, 47²⁴.

⁴ Ezekiel 47²² C.B.

⁵ Ezekiel 21²; Deut. 15¹⁻¹⁸; Jer. 34¹⁴; Lev. 25³⁹⁻⁴¹.

⁶ Amos 8⁵; Hosea 12⁷; Micah 6¹⁰; Isaiah 3^{14, 25}.

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weights and measures.¹ Coined money was not yet known in Palestine. Where the balances were necessary in every transaction, not only for the commodities but for the payment, opportunities for dishonesty were universal. Collections of Hebrew weights have been discovered, at Gezer and elsewhere, with hardly one of the stones identical or in an accurate mathematical relation with any of the rest. Ezekiel's method of exhortation was prosaic, but it went to the heart of the matter.

Underneath all this lies the shrewd conviction that financial unrest is the cause of all social trouble ; the desire for unjust gain on the one hand, and the sense of being unjustly treated on the other. In this country we have long outgrown the elementary political evils that roused the anger of the Biblical writers. We have forgotten the fear felt both for the "unjust judge" and the rapacious "publican." This fact makes both Old and New Testaments seem foreign and unreal. But so to think of them is to misunderstand them seriously. Even our modern problems, housing and land, labour and wages, had appeared in Palestine a century and more before Ezekiel was born.² And although the statesmen and idealists of his country found it as difficult to hit upon successful remedies as some of the wisest of our own contemporaries, Ezekiel himself grasped the central truth when he became aware that efforts to bring to an end unsocial and unbrotherly conduct are less valuable than provisions to remove its causes.

We are now brought to the description of what may be more exactly called Ezekiel's "Utopia," his "no-place," since the territorial arrangements

¹ Ezekiel 45^{11f.} cf. Lev. 19^{35f.}

² Isaiah 5⁸⁻¹⁶.

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which he proceeds to make, though they could be realised in North Germany or even in our own eastern counties, could certainly not be carried out in so uneven and mountainous a country as Palestine. But that is no difficulty to him. We have already discussed the dream-like features of this part of his vision; the ease with which actual considerations of form and physical limitation are transcended. It was characteristic of Ezekiel, in periods of psychical exaltation, to start from the actual and familiar and then launch out into what was physically impossible and to our minds sometimes grotesque. The appearance of the heavenly chariot was the first and most striking example of this mental habit. He never lost touch with sober and waking reality. Matters which had once appealed to his strong practical interests would reappear in the most fantastic visions; witness the reference to the "burial party"¹ which would be needed after the great slaughter of the invading barbarians. And in the final vision which we now approach, although the river which he describes is apparently to run up-hill and follow a course which the tangled hills to the south-east of Jerusalem made quite impossible, the trees on its banks, he notes, are not only to bear fruit, their very leaves are to possess medicinal qualities;² and while the sweet waters are to turn the Dead Sea itself into a normal and beautiful lake,³ the salt industry which had flourished on its shores is not to be brought to an end.⁴ Salt will still be produced in the marshes at its southern extremity. Ezekiel was no visionary in the sense in which we most frequently use the term. However large and bold his ideas, he would

¹ Ezekiel 39¹⁴.

² Ezekiel 47¹².

³ Ezekiel 47⁹.

⁴ Ezekiel 47¹¹.

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take pains to see that the smallest interests were not sacrificed to the largest ; the improvement of the many was never to be inconsistent with justice to the few.

This mingling of practical details with projects of wide social and religious reconstruction was the mark, perhaps indeed the origin, of what is to many readers his most remarkable and valuable forecast. The river which issued from the Temple, under the very altar, would have done much to transform life in Jerusalem and Southern Judah. Water has always been far more needed in Jerusalem than it was needed in London when Sir Hugh Middleton was working at his great scheme for the "new river" from the Middlesex uplands. The constant possibility of siege by Assyrian or Chaldean troops made this perennial scarcity of water a pressing danger, all the more pressing as the chief supply came from outside the walls. Ahaz had turned his attention to the problem,¹ and Hezekiah had done his best to meet the difficulty by cutting the channel where the work of his labourers can still be seen.² This, however, was no more than a makeshift, though a bold one ; and the first thing that Ezekiel saw when he turned to the actual configuration of the city and its environs was the gushing forth of a stream of clear water, small and thin at first, but increasing so rapidly that within a mile and a half of its source, it was too deep to be forded.³

Students of the prophet have seen in this life-giving river a symbol of the life-giving power of the spirit dwelling at the river's source, the Temple. The keenest and most original student of all, the author of the Apocalypse, found in it the suggestion

¹ Isaiah 85.

² 2 Kings 20²⁰ ; 2 Chron. 32³⁰.

³ Ezekiel 47⁵.

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for one of his noblest pictures, the river of life flowing through the midst of the heavenly city (in his picture of the city there was no Temple), on whose banks grew trees bearing twelve kinds of fruit each month (a precise touch in which he goes beyond Ezekiel), and whose leaves were for the healing of the nations (Ezekiel was concerned with no nation except his own).¹ To Ezekiel the practical was not marked off from the spiritual by any insuperable barrier; and he may well have felt that a stream which started from the very threshold of the sacred building, to flow directly eastward, could not but be a symbol of the fertilising holiness of Jahve's presence. But in the whole section there is not a word to suggest this. It may be indeed that the new vegetation which the stream made possible in the barren regions of the South would help to provide a symmetry hitherto lacking—and we are aware of the value which Ezekiel always attached to symmetry—between the southern and the northern halves of the country. But if we follow his own language, we must conclude that he was thinking solely of the needs of the restored population. His vision of a new water supply could doubtless be carried out, even in Palestine, by the skill of modern science; even in the sixteenth century the Turkish emperor, Suliman the Magnificent, presented the city with a complete water supply: and we are left with the interesting and curious reflection that the dream of a physical engineer, as we may call it, has provided one of the most striking anticipations of religious faith.²

¹ Rev. 21²², 22¹².

² When Jerusalem was entered by the British troops in December, 1917, the population of 50,000 subsisted for its water supply for the most part on

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This settled, his eye takes a wider sweep, and ranges over the territorial boundaries of the entire country. To us, the passage in which he describes this part of his experience is as dull and as arbitrary as the delimitation of frontiers, through strings of obscure villages, which is one of the chief tasks of a modern Peace Conference. But to Ezekiel there was neither dullness nor arbitrariness. Every place in his list was familiar to himself and his readers. The ideal frontiers of Palestine were as well known to the Hebrews as are the ideal frontiers of their troubled Balkan lands to Serbs or Bulgars. For their eager minds, the names of tiny hamlets in Macedonia take on a secular significance. Ezekiel is really engaged in the task to which every fiery patriot on the continent devoted himself as soon as the armistice of November 1918 was signed. If we take out the map, we shall see the spirit in which he went to work. The country was to be united; that went without saying. The Northern and Southern Kingdoms would be one, as in the mind of the most patriotic Hebrews they had never ceased to be. And on the north, the Hebrew lands would stretch farther than they had ever done, save under David and Solomon; Hamath, the farthest point mentioned, had been Syrian and not Israelite for centuries.¹ Southwards, no

rain-water cisterns, one of which, it was found, had not been emptied for nineteen years. The Royal Engineers started work on a group of spring heads on the hills at some distance from the city, which would supply 14,000 gallons per hour. The water was lifted to the top of a hill and then conveyed to reservoirs on the out-skirts of Jerusalem. It was then made available for each householder on application. The result was that the consumption of water became ten times what it was before, with the best consequences for the health of the population. The whole work was carried through in two months. (W. T. Massey, "How Jerusalem was Won.")

¹ Ezekiel 47¹⁶ C.B.; 1 Kings 8⁶⁵, 4²¹; cf. Gen. 15²⁸.

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extension of territory was possible. The unconquerable desert settled that. The western boundary was the Mediterranean coast. If the Hebrews had never completely occupied the coastal plain, there was now no other political authority that could dispute it with them. The uncircumcised Philistines were to be rivals for the south-west no longer. It was on the subject of the eastern boundary of Palestine that Ezekiel's arrangements were most original and, to his contemporaries, disappointing. Gilead and everything else east of the Jordan he frankly gave up. It is true that the wolds and uplands east of the Jordan had always been debateable land; the absence of any definite geographical features to mark them off from the desert condemned them to be a perpetual battle-ground between Israel and Moab, Edom and Ammon. They might be called the Syrian Macedonia. All the central Semites had fought for them, as all the Southern Slavs had fought for the stretch of land between the Struma and the Drina. But the oldest traditions of Israel had assigned it to Hebrew tribes; the country between Hauran and the Jabbok had shown itself again and again to be the home of loyalty to Israelite ideals; and the fact that it had long been the subject of fierce contention would naturally make the politician determined not to surrender an inch of it. Ezekiel, more anxious for peace than for national "honour," saw that a territory which had never been completely "Hebraised" could not be claimed successfully; and the surrender does honour to his political wisdom and courage.¹

Possibly another consideration weighed with

¹ Ezekiel 47¹⁸.

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him, or had weighed with him when he was thinking out the arrangements that took definite shape in this period of illumination. The land was to be holy, cleared of the presence of the foreigner. Where nationalities were mixed, this could never be the case. It was therefore better to give up such regions altogether. Such a conclusion will hardly appeal to modern statesmen. Yet it saved Ezekiel from the perils of chauvinism. Those perils, in his time, and to men of his magnificent faith, were far from negligible. In the downfall of all the surrounding powers, what territorial acquisitions might not be hoped for by the new realm of Israel, once it was actually restored? Why should it not realise the traditional aspiration of possessing the gates of its enemies? Why should it not at least gain control of Edom or even stretch away, as old prophecies had foretold, to the Euphrates? Ezekiel was too cautious to have any sympathy with these projects. Now that the state of Palestine will have again to be considered, and this delimitation of her frontiers has become a problem for modern politicians, it may be that the wisest solution of the problem will turn out to be different from that championed by Ezekiel.¹ But Ezekiel knew that, for the aims which he had set before himself, the mere extension of territory might simply be a source of fresh weakness. He preferred to consolidate what no one could dispute. It is probable that more than one Peace Conference in Europe would have gained if Ezekiel could have been present to influence its delegates. And if the prophet shrank from the inclusion within his frontiers of a district of mixed

¹ See Sidebotham, "England and Palestine," pp. 195ff.

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populations, he had no fanatical hatred for the foreigner. Indeed, he is for extending the rights of full citizenship to resident aliens, a proceeding as open-minded as it was prudent.¹

This consolidation is the last part of Ezekiel's task. The fashion in which he performs it is certainly surprising. His love of symmetrical arrangement now defies all difficulties and lifts him away from anything that could be carried out or even tolerated in actual practice. The twelve tribes are rearranged in parallel strips, stretching from east to west, quite irrespective of the varying fertility and configuration of the country, and the inequality of the length of the strips due to the shape of the coast-line. We are reminded of the diagrammatic boundaries between some of the central and western states of North America.² Here Ezekiel's practical instincts seem to fail him. How could he expect that all his countrymen, on reaching Palestine, would consent to leave their old family holdings, even if they themselves had been born in exile, and settle down elsewhere? The truth is that he is now simply thinking of the Temple as the centre of the country. The tribes are rearranged, nearer to the Temple, or further from it, according to some scheme connected with their descent from Rachel or Leah, Bilhah or Zilpah. Around the Temple stretches the priests' estate, a rectangle roughly eight miles by three, extending from beyond the Mount of Olives and Bethany some way towards the modern village of Ain Karim. North of it is a rectangle of equal size for the estate of the Levites; south, another of equal length and just half the breadth, for the

¹ Ezekiel 47²² C.B.

² Ezekiel 48^{off}.

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capital, the city itself occupying the whole of the centre, immediately to the south of the Temple, with an open space or park on either side; while to the east and west of the whole square, between eight and nine miles each way, lie the estates of the prince, with the territory of Judah on the north and Benjamin on the south.¹

In this way, Ezekiel secures his two great ends, symmetry and holiness, for the core and centre of the new state. The whole enclave, the Temple, and the city, are perfect squares, the city, like the glorified city in the Apocalypse, having three gates in each wall;² and the Temple lies at the exact centre of the whole system. Similarly, the Temple, protected by the estates of the priests, is no longer a part of the city and within its walls, as in the days of the kings, but outside it, and therefore as safe from ritual pollution as could be secured by any arrangement. If necessary, every person who approached could be scrutinised, and any undesirable visitor at once turned back. Repellent as is such caution to our minds, and redolent of all that is narrowest and most perverse in later Judaism, we must recognise Ezekiel's faithfulness to the fundamental axiom of true religion as he understood it; and if his Temple was unique in the success with which its location could keep out worshippers of the wrong kind, it was in order that no intruding hucksters could ever be able to turn it into a "den of thieves," and that the city built outside its walls yet underneath its shadow might rejoice in the name of "Jahve is there."³

¹ Ezekiel 48⁹⁻²².

² Ezekiel 48^{11ff}; Rev. 21¹³.

³ Ezekiel 48³⁵.

CHAPTER XV

THE GUIDING THREAD

WITH the description of the new and symmetrical city, gazing northwards at the equally symmetrical Temple on its mountain height, Ezekiel's constructive work is done. There was nothing more to be added. It was only necessary to wait till the time came when all that he had seen could be carried out into actual fact. The few years of vigorous life that remained to him could best be used by inspiring his countrymen with his own idea and faith, and giving to the record of his visions that order and harmony which was the very cement, as it were, of the great building of his thought.

This final task he never accomplished. It did not indeed present the special difficulties with which Baruch had to wrestle when he set about editing and arranging the remains of his master Jeremiah. Baruch succeeded in getting the records of his master's earlier work into some sort of chronological order; but the discourses which followed the destroying madness of Jehoiakim, though for the most part carefully dated, were still in confusion when exile or death put an end to Baruch's toil, and the prophecies were bound up into a roll by some other disciple who was more anxious to preserve than to arrange.

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Ezekiel, in his Mesopotamian home, had more leisure and more security to arrange his papers; and the reader knows nothing of the bewilderment felt by the student of Jeremiah at being hurried backward and forward from one period to another. Occasionally, indeed, the reader of Ezekiel suspects that he can discover joins in the smooth texture of the fabric. There are two little prophecies of restoration which obviously occur out of their proper place.¹ They appear in the midst of the section on foreign nations, and they both happen to follow paragraphs which are themselves detached. The second of these is particularly interesting. It refers to the removal of the ban of silence, yet it follows a section which, as we shall see shortly, is the last piece that Ezekiel ever wrote. The reader who has a due appreciation for the care exercised by Ezekiel himself will surmise that these fragments were neglected by the master, but that later some disciple, more anxious to secure all that the master had left than instructed (in the absence of precise dates) as to the circumstances of every utterance, fastened them up in the most convenient part of the collection, and there they have remained.

That Ezekiel, having come to the end of his work, did not entirely lay it aside, is certain. He had given too many hostages to fortune in the shape of predictions; he had to watch over their fate. With regard to the old city, indeed, history had abundantly justified his tragic confidence. As for the new, he could leave his justification to time. Whether it actually came in his own generation was a matter of no importance. But it was different

¹ Ezekiel 28²⁵, 29²¹ C.B.

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with regard to his predictions as to the other nations. True, at the time when he was writing them, the fulfilment did not seem unlikely. The marvelously successful and well-organised hosts of Babylon might do what Assyria herself had never done under Tiglath-Pileser or Sennacherib. Had not the ruin of Tyre already been predicted,¹ and had not Jeremiah announced that Egypt would be delivered into the hands of Nebuchadnezzar and then restored?² Ezekiel himself had added³ that at the end of a generation after her ruin ("forty years") she would struggle back into some sort of despised independence. And though the expected blow had not fallen when he was editing his work, it was by no means improbable.

With the prediction about Tyre, however, there was a real difficulty.⁴ Nebuchadnezzar did, as a matter of fact, lay siege to Tyre. Ezekiel waited for the news of its downfall, but the siege was a lengthy business and the news did not come. Tyre could not be taken by a power which had not the command of the sea, and Nebuchadnezzar had not a single ship on the Mediterranean. He drew his forces off, and in 586 B.C., eighteen years after Ezekiel's prophecies, he was invading Egypt. Ezekiel recognised the mistake. Tyre was not to fall for the time being, and Nebuchadnezzar, baulked of the loot of Tyre, would have to comfort himself and his army with the result of his operations on the Nile. It would be unjust to Ezekiel to call the section in which he embodied this new conviction a palinode or a recantation. He was not persuaded that Tyre was safe in perpetuity. But her temporary escape, he now saw, had its

¹ Isaiah 23.

² Jer. 46²⁶,

³ Ezekiel 29¹³.

⁴ Ezekiel 29¹⁷⁻²⁰ C.B.

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effect on the fate of Egypt ; and it is therefore in his section on Egypt, and not on Tyre, that he carefully inserts this addendum. It is dated two years before the Egyptian invasion, and a year and a half after the vision of the Temple.

Had Ezekiel lived longer there might have been other additions. Interpreting each new complete certainty that came into his mind as a word of Jahve, he was bound to treat it with the same reverence as what had preceded. Consideration of the intrinsic worth of the work he has left us might make us wish, as we must wish in the case of another poet-preacher, Wordsworth, that he could have been more critical as to what had once shaped itself in his mind ; but we should have been the poorer in material for understanding him.

However this may be, his work as it stands is a completed whole. In this respect, Ezekiel is quite unlike the other prophets, and he gives us an opportunity of examining his work which is impossible with them. As for the Minor Prophets, "minor" only on account of the quantity, not the quality of the work they have left us, we possess far too little to detect more than a certain way of looking at the world and human society. The volume entitled "Isaiah" contains the writings of more authors than one ; the work of the man who gave his name to the collection is largely occasional and not always easy to detach from the rest. Jeremiah has left us a mass of writings, speeches, sermons, extracts from his *journal intime*, mixed with narrative and supplementary matter ; but he cared little for co-ordination, and his denunciations and appeals are allowed to jostle one another upon the road without an attempt to marshal them into a disciplined unit.

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The unit commanded by Ezekiel is a motley one. But it is a unit. And he makes it march in a definite direction. That direction is given us, to use his own favourite word, by the conception of "holiness." In dealing with the other prophets we can explain or understand each section by a consideration of the circumstances of the time, as they saw them in relation to Jahve's demands for repentance and morality. In dealing with Ezekiel, we are met with the recognition of a gradually unfolding divine purpose, the vindication of holiness in the chosen nation. Whatever his subject, this decides the length and the nature of its treatment. He reminds us in this respect of one of the great epic poets, a Virgil or a Dante. For in a great epic we can perceive in some sort the ruling purpose of the poet from the first line; the mighty labour of founding the Roman stock—" *tantae molis erat Romanam condere gentem* "—or the unerring retribution that awaits every human life from Him in Whose will is our peace.

But the poet has leisure to think out his work; to see the end from the beginning before he puts pen to paper. Unity for him is a comparatively simple matter. Let him think but deep enough on this central and guiding conception, and all else will subordinate itself to it. Ezekiel, too, had leisure; more leisure than any other of the great prophets; and to this fact we owe it that Ezekiel has left us a *corpus* rather than mere *dissecta membra*, however valuable. But his was no leisure in which to see the end from the beginning. His thoughts came to him successively through a long life of literary activity. It is as certain as anything can be in the interpretation of another man's mind that

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when he began to write in 592, he did not know how he was going to finish in 572. And yet not only does the end fit in with the beginning ; the beginning fits in with the end.

There could be no more appropriate introduction for the picture of the glorious and perfect Temple than the thirty-nine chapters which precede it. If anyone doubts this, let him compare the chapters which precede the great vision of the Holy City in the Apocalypse. It is in a high degree unlikely that their composition stretched over a space of twenty years, and they certainly do present us with a picture of world confusion which gives us, at the calm descent of the new Jerusalem from heaven, an almost unearthly sense of relief. But let the reader ask himself whether the author of the Apocalypse, with the actual work of Ezekiel immediately before him, has given us in his earlier chapters anything approaching the artistic symmetry, the co-ordination of part with part, of his type and model. It is perhaps in this prevision of the end from the beginning, this preparation for the final effect of the edifice even in the laying of the foundation stones, that we can best find the distinctive inspiration and guidance of Ezekiel by that higher power to which he himself refers all that he has to express. It will be worth while to look at this a little more closely.

Ezekiel's whole work, as we have seen, groups itself round the conception of holiness. This we may regard as a natural result of his education. As surely as to the earnest young nonconformist religion centres round the thought of conversion, so to the earnest young priest in Jerusalem it would centre round holiness. This is clear in the vision

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which launched him on his active career. It is true that he did not, like Isaiah¹, hear the song of the heavenly beings, "Holy, holy, holy, is Jahve." What was spoken by the voice above the platform,² we are not told; but the whole vision is so plainly an elaboration, an extension of Isaiah's, that we do not need the awe-inspiring accompaniment of fire and noise and lightning to know that in Ezekiel's ears "Jahve is holy" was its burden.

In the preaching which followed his call, however, little seems to be said on the subject. The word hardly occurs. But the thought is there continuously. We shall not recognise it, indeed, if we think of holiness merely as obedience to an arbitrary system of directions and ordinances, and a strict but intelligent avoidance of what is taboo. Doubtless there were Hebrews in every age to whom holiness meant no more than this. To Ezekiel it was the one condition and means of approach to Jahve. Jahve had revealed this path to His presence, the way of ritual, cleanliness and moral purity. He had commanded His servants to follow it. If they disobeyed the result could only be ruin for them and misery and horror for those who had to watch the process and were powerless to prevent it.

This is the thought that underlies the constant reiteration of rebelliousness; the reference to rejected judgments and neglected statutes; the portrayal of the horrors of siege as the eating of unclean food; the emphasis on impure worship as the sign of Jerusalem's wickedness; the mingling of ritual and moral crimes and virtues in describing the conduct of the sinner and the

¹ Isaiah 64.

² Ezekiel 1²⁶.

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righteous man; and the overmastering suggestions of degradation and filth when the nations of Israel and Judah are pilloried as two abandoned women.

As we have already noticed, it is characteristic of holiness that its opposite inspires disgust. Uncleanliness is something at which one's gorge rises. No one can read the first half of Ezekiel's work without recognising in him a large capacity for disgust. And when he passes to the constructive portion of his task and describes the sorrow of the nation as, in exile, it recognises its sins, the men pine away, he says, in their iniquities, as if in the grip of some contagious and foul disease; and when, at last, restored and forgiven, they begin to taste the blessings they have forfeited for so long, they will at that supreme moment "loathe themselves for all their abominations,"¹ as if, healed and restored, they still had to look on faces pitted by small-pox or limbs mutilated and deformed by leprosy. The days of the new purity are days in which they will no longer "defile themselves with their abominable things," the hideous practices and objects of their degradation.*

It is unnecessary, after the two previous chapters, to spend time in noticing how holiness is the key to the planning of the Temple and its accessories and surroundings. But it is worth while to point out that the holiness of the Temple is the holiness which had been prefigured in the dark days before the exile. It is something which ensures that a way will remain open for Israel to approach Jahve and for Jahve to approach Israel, and which will render the old disgusting parodies of religion for ever impossible.

¹ Ezekiel 36³¹.

² Ezekiel 37²³.

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This after all is what matters most to the happiness and safety of the nation. Nothing else really matters at all. It will then be the chief business of the priests to instruct the people on this point; to teach them the difference between the holy and the common, to train their religious susceptibilities, so to speak.¹ True, that difference exists in the material as well as in the moral world; acts must be avoided whose connection with Jahve's continued presence is far from clear, at least to a mind trained in the simpler sanctities of Protestantism;² but that Ezekiel was no mere tither of mint and cummin or enthusiastic only for the outside of the cup or the plate is shown by his noble outburst to the princes of Israel and his care for the lands of the people; for here too is holiness.³

The word *holy* has been unfortunate in its history. Its Latin relative, *saint*, has suffered even more. On the one hand much has been made of its kinship with the obscure and capricious restrictions of savage and primitive religions. In reality, what we know as savage religion is rarely primitive. Its taboos could originally give some reasons for themselves. These reasons have long since been forgotten. The fear of vague and indeterminate evils alone remains, inflicted by vague and indeterminate powers. Infraction brings its penalty; but obedience brings no reward. Some Hebrews may have thought of holiness in this way; Ezekiel certainly did not. How could one, he would have asked, complain of caprice in the prohibitions by which holiness was guarded? As well com-

¹ Ezekiel 44²³.

² Ezekiel 44¹⁹.

³ Ezekiel 45⁹, 46²⁸.

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plain that the rules of cleanliness and hygiene were capricious. And as for holiness merely warding off calamities, it certainly would do that; and, he would add, the sufferers from the miseries of the exile might well be grateful even for such negative results. But it would do far more. In essence it was positive and not negative. So, too, were its results, the positive blessings of communion with Jahve and delight in His presence.

On the other hand, the "saint" often suggests the Pharisee, the man at the other end of the religious scale, who had so completely solved the problem of avoiding impurity that he could afford to look down on his less fortunate brothers,¹ or even neglect the simpler rules of morality. There is nothing of the Pharisee about Ezekiel. The goodness of his restored exiles is rooted in self-loathing, not in self-satisfaction. They are sinners "saved by grace"; they can never "forget the wormwood and the gall"; and if they have learnt to think with horror of swinging censers in front of pictures of dirty animals sprawling on the wall, or of bringing dead bodies into the sunlight and clean colonnades of the Temple, they have learnt to think with equal horror of the defilement of adultery, and the degradation of avarice and cheating.

The foregoing considerations reveal what we may call two focal points in holiness as Ezekiel understood it; the first, emphasised chiefly in the earlier half of his career, that breaches of the moral code, equally with ritual disobedience, entail defilement and degradation, and with it the loss of all that makes life worth living; the second, to which he gave the keenest thought of his later years, that

¹ Luke 18^{xx}.

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the right attitude of mind in a community must be preserved by right institutions.

Let us consider each of these contentions. The first we might express in a phrase that Ezekiel certainly would not repudiate, that covetousness and dishonesty and fornication are as degrading and loathsome as leprosy or syphilis. This is the teaching of the New Testament as well as of Ezekiel.¹ Jesus, with His penetrating shrewdness, has given it perfect expression. And it finds a curious echo in what we look upon as an entirely modern product, the ideal of "good form." The canon of good form cannot be said to make any exalted demands upon its supporters; but at all events the actions which it forbids belong to all three realms, the physical, the social and the moral. And this is, after all, the point of importance, to associate with unsocial and immoral actions the repulsion inspired by physical uncleanness.

Ezekiel can hardly be classed as an educationist; but this principle of holiness which with him is cardinal is of the greatest value for all moral education. It is the first task of the educator to inspire—or perhaps we had better say, to bring out, or educe—the love of the good, the hatred of the evil. After nearly two millennia and a half since Plato and Aristotle this is still usually attempted by holding out rewards and punishments, appealing to hopes and fears. The history of mankind in the intervening centuries has proved the futility of the attempt. Even if that attitude of mind were worth the name of virtue which is nothing but a "reasonable self-love," a cool and prudent calculation of results, it could not hope to turn all the

¹ cf. Mark 7²¹⁻²³.

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jostling street corners of life without a fall. Rewards and punishments follow too irregularly. Hopes and fears are both too often disappointed. Prudence itself will often join with the instinct of the gambler to take the risk and "pocket the consequences."

Add to this the significant but little noticed psychological fact that "Do not" has often the effect of "Do." The instructor turns the mind of his pupils to the act they are to avoid. He does not hide from them, he is even ready to remind them, that it may be as profitable as an undetected theft, as exciting as dicing, as pleasurable as fornication; but it is "wrong," it is "sinful," it must not be done. No wonder that the suggestible mind of the pupil, with the image of the act itself, and its highly attractive (though of course possibly dangerous) consequences held before it, dwells on the act until imagination, as imagination so often will, issues in performance.

How much wiser is the method here suggested by Ezekiel. It is the method which has proved itself in the childhood of the race, as the student of comparative religion would remind us, when he reduces all holiness to a system of taboos. It is equally effective with the individual child and youth. For disgust is an emotion easily aroused and hard to overcome. Certain objects and conditions awake disgust in us all, as they do in the lowest savages. Certain other disgusts we learn as we become members of more or less civilised society. Why should we not learn to turn as coldly from a man who "rigs the market" or rack-rents insanitary house property as we turn from a man who sits down to a dinner party or kneels at the communion table with

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unclean hands, or why not think of sexual indulgence as we think of "filthy rags" ?

But holiness as Ezekiel understood it is more than disgust for the unclean ; it is admiration—with him it was a positive passion—for the clean. The passion for cleanliness of body, or for clean fresh air, is now familiar to an increasing number of people. It does not come by nature ; it has to be taught in order to be brought out. The schoolboy learns that it is something that he can like and admire. Why can he not learn the passion for veracity, for the honour of the "*chevalier sans peur et sans reproche*," for the purity of heart by which alone access is possible to the joys of a true marriage, or to communion with the unseen ? To be furnished with "good habits" such as these is to wear armour against temptation that could never be forged in the workshops of the Utilitarians.

Even this is not enough. The great teacher who in a single phrase crowned all that was permanent and dismissed all that was temporary in Ezekiel's conception of holiness, knew well—what Ezekiel never guessed—that the one certain safeguard for goodness is devoted love to that goodness embodied in a person. Only a person can be the appropriate object of a consuming passion. "Abide in me and I in you." Into that love, one must be "born again." Ezekiel never spoke of the love of God or of love to God. He would have shrunk from doing so. He had not learned the daring language of Hosea. He had not felt the warmth and ardour that glows in Deuteronomy. But he had understood the necessity for a new birth. We have noticed this already, and we shall return to it in the next chapter. And he also understood that all his

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precautions to ensure holiness were only of use after that re-birth had taken place. The new Temple was prepared for the worship of Israel after Israel had learnt to loathe and abominate its old life, not before.

This brings us to the second of our focal points. The right attitude of mind, once it has been produced in a community, must be preserved by right institutions. The word "institution" has no equivalent in Biblical Hebrew. Could it have been explained to Ezekiel, it would have suggested the priesthood, sacrifice, land-tenure, the position of the prince and the administration of justice. For us, the word has other suggestions, the family, the neighbourhood, industry, the school, the church and the state. Could these also have been explained to him, he would doubtless have found much to surprise him ; but he would not have been altogether at a loss. The first and the two last he would certainly have been able to understand ; and he would have been ready to urge that for them, as for the institutions more frequently in his own thoughts, the rule just enunciated holds good.

All institutions are the expressions of a certain social attitude, and are "kept going," so to speak, to attain a certain social end. The health of society is dependent on the health of its institutions. If the institutions are decadent or degraded, society itself degenerates. Much of Ezekiel's active life, indeed, was devoted to the enforcement of this truth. The priesthood had grown careless, selfish, corrupt ; the sacrifices were idolatrous and revolting ; the courts of justice were disgraced by false witnesses and venality ; the rulers had behaved as irresponsible and avaricious tyrants.

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The result was that the whole of society was rotten with avarice and lawlessness, and faced by ruin. Its only hope lay in a resurrection from the ashes of the fire already kindled for its destruction, and in a new life when the priests should be removed from all possibility of corruption and greed; when the decisions of the judges should be lifted above all temptations to venality; when permanent enclosures of land, as we should call them, should automatically become impossible, and when the prince could have no opportunities for the oppressions of the past.

Let us apply all this to our own social institutions: the family, the school, the land, the press, capital and labour, the state itself, and, looking more widely, to diplomacy and international relations. Each has suffered from what Ezekiel would call pollution. Self-indulgence, avarice, suspicion, injustice, the idolatry of the worship of wealth and power, have all been at work as the agents of corruption. Both luxury and poverty have postponed marriage and interfered with the training of children; the factory has been allowed to drag the boys and girls away from the school before their proper time; the land, instead of being enjoyed by all, has fallen within the iron grasp of the few. Capital and labour, each suspecting every word and act of the other, glare at one another like mortal enemies bound together by a chain they cannot break. Political leaders, engrossed in their petty and selfish rivalries, neglect the great questions of justice and a good life for the mass of the people; and diplomacy, the preserve of a small and interested class of men, totally ignorant of the true needs and real hopes of the people they can only

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misrepresent, has succeeded in plunging the whole world into a war whose horror surpasses all the resources of human language.

Such accusations are familiar to us all. It is not our business to ask how far they may be exaggerated. No doubt Ezekiel's contemporaries thought that he was guilty of considerable exaggeration. No one can doubt, however, that these assertions all contain a very serious amount of truth. And if we could have imagined ourselves to have carried our explanation of modern conditions to Ezekiel as far as this point, we might fancy him turning to us and replying, "Then your own country, too, has been befouled by its idolatries. You, too, need a new spirit, a new heart. May Jahve in His mercy grant it to you. But when you have received it, you will need to guard against fresh pollution in the future. Can you not make laws that will render marriage possible to all who desire its joys and responsibilities; that will give your children, poor as well as rich, the education to fit them thoroughly for this brave new world of yours; that will keep the larger part of the land in the hands of the people, or bring it back to them after a term of years; that will prevent the rich from grinding the faces of the poor, and draw your capital and labour together as allies, not as foes; that will put an end to the setting at naught of the righteous claims of the many in the interests of the few; and that will furnish a way by which the nations can enter into a covenant or league, when the demands of each can have justice done to them by the wisdom of all, and none will have anything to hope from making war on another?"

Merely to imagine such questions in the mouth

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of Ezekiel shows how far modern conditions have moved from the simplicity of life in his day. They are the questions which wise men are now beginning to learn to ask. And to some of them at least we are even trying to work out the answers. Nor can we say that we have learnt either the questions or the answers from Ezekiel. No statesman has ever thought of turning to him for guidance in the task of reconstruction. Yet, translated into our modern language, they are identical with the main questions and answers that he has left us ; and with so much of the work of reconstruction before us, it may not be amiss to ponder over the convictions, and the hopes, with which he faced the labour of rebuilding a city out of the ashes of her former glory, and a society out of the disintegration and despair of exile.

CHAPTER XVI

THE CORNER STONE OF RECONSTRUCTION

WE are now reaching the end of our journey, and we will turn back for a moment to survey the road by which we have come. We started with a consideration of reconstruction; finding it to mean the use of old materials for an edifice which should be free from the old weaknesses and faults. We then turned to our proper subject, the activity of the author of one of the few notable attempts at reconstruction that history has left us. We paused to see how the old bad world he knew was falling to pieces around him, and to notice how for a long while he himself was more intent on the process of demolition than of building up.¹ Then, after the crash came, we watched him, now past middle life, settling himself to his main task, and following certain rules which seemed to us, in an age curiously like his own, in spite of its obvious differences, to be pregnant with suggestiveness and wisdom.

It did not escape us, however, that he did not look to those rules and principles alone. The old site was cleared; the plans for the new building, as he would say, were revealed to him; but before they could be carried out, something else was necessary. The new building was not simply the work of men instructed and guided by divine wisdom;

¹ cf. Jer. i¹⁰.

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the corner stone had first to be laid, carefully selected and costly.¹ For this, no human skill was sufficient; the heavenly artificer was alone equal to this part of the task. Only when He had given the nation a new heart, could the framer of the laws of worship and social polity begin his part. If we are to look to Ezekiel for more than suggestions and hints, anticipations of laws whose value we are now beginning to discover, we must consider this matter of the corner-stone. Otherwise, we may be able to congratulate ourselves that we are reproducing some of Ezekiel's details, the designs of his door-ways or pinnacles, by no means unimportant; but the idea and spirit of our building, if it is ever to be erected, can make no appeal to his authority or plan.

A metaphor is often useful in revealing the weak point of the conception it is intended to develop; and now that we have carried out our metaphor thus far, we shall probably be met by a rather arresting question. What use can it be to go back to so distant a period, and so alien a mind as Ezekiel's, for light on our own problems? Superficial resemblances, it will be said, may be found, if we have enough ingenuity and patience to look for them, as they may be found between the mud hut of the Kaffir and the mansion in Park Lane. But to go to Ezekiel for light on the problems of modern statecraft is surely no wiser than if an architect in grey northern latitudes, with a school or council chamber to design, should study the plans of a building intended, beneath the warmth of southern skies, to serve the purposes of festival and worship.

The question is a shrewd one; and nothing can be gained from neglecting the immense differences

¹ Isaiah 28¹⁶, 1 Peter 2⁶.

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that separate Ezekiel's period and outlook from our own. Hitherto, in our anxiety to establish points of contact, we have rather taken these differences for granted. It would take too long to pass them all in review, but we will notice two of them, not only because of their intrinsic importance, but also because they apply as much to the new world which Ezekiel contemplated as to the old from which he was turning away. The first is the relation of Church to State ; the second is the place of popular responsibility in the established political order. In the mind of Ezekiel and of all the men of his time, Church and State were one. This does not mean that they could have understood the mediæval idea of one vast society in which religion and government were two aspects of the same thing. It was rather the compromise of the later Reformation, "*cujus regio, ejus religio*," which they treated as an axiom. Nonconformity was unknown. Perhaps it would be more exact to say that the only kind of nonconformity known was the worship of the gods of other communities, and this was at once impiety and treason. In a well-ordered state, such as was to arise in Palestine after the return from exile, it would be impossible. Every citizen was a member of the national and established church ; he would support its priesthood as with us he must support the national judicature and army. He was expected to attend its services as, to-day, he is expected to send his children to school.

In our modern world the last remains of this identity have everywhere been swept away. The established church in England is in a wholly different position from the established church in Israel. In the choice of statesmen and officials, we do not ask

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what religion is professed, or whether any religion is professed at all. The same thing is true of the new republics now rising out of the wrecks of the European empires, and even of the Slav races of the Balkans, where religion and politics were only a few years ago inseparable. Spiritual and religious uniformity have disappeared for ever. There are few who would regret this disappearance, but it serves to mark the chasm between us and the whole world of the Old Testament.

Even here, however, we must beware of superficial judgment. Wise statesmen no longer hope for anything from religious uniformity. They even look upon it as a danger. But something in the nature of spiritual unity may have a very different result. Spiritual unity does not depend on conformity or identity in religious observance. It is something far deeper. To many people its very nature was hardly suspected before the outbreak of the war. And when, in those tremendous days, it revealed itself, it did not accomplish this by united services or public and state gatherings for prayer, but by a common and wide-spread enthusiasm for devotion and self-sacrifice, for the good name and honour of the nation, and, in this country at least, for the vindication of the freedom and integrity of smaller nations and the destruction of tyranny and ambition.

The dangers have passed ; and the enthusiasms, it must be admitted, are passing. But they have left us with a conception which we cannot allow to pass ; the conception of a people united for worthy and noble ends, and sharing high and self-forgetful desires. We were willing, in the latter half of 1914, to face all the unknown terrors of war rather than

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allow Great Britain to be untrue to her pledge and unfaithful to her friends. We flung aside our rivalries and mutual suspicions. We surrendered at a single impulse all that we had looked on as our most valued possessions. We gained our end. We paid the price. No one now can call us unfaithful or untrue. Thanks, surely, to a divine impulse, overmastering all the confused desires and cross currents of the time, we kept our honour.

But there are other ends to be gained. National honour is not preserved for all time by refusing to tear up one scrap of paper. The common enthusiasm of 1914, the surrender of individual hatreds and hopes, must win for us the higher honour of a nation whose word in commerce, as in diplomacy, is as good as her bond, and whose citizens will swear even to their own hurt and not change.¹ We cannot pretend that either at the moment when we threw out the challenge to Germany or subsequently, the purity of our motives has been unmingled. The use of words will often cast searching light on a nation's thought and morals; and the sinister extension of the word "profiteer," coined shortly before the war, tells its own tale. The desire to make money out of another's needs has not been confined to any one class. There was gold in the fire, but it was sadly mingled with dross. The dross has still to be refined away. (We have still to build up a nation that shall not be wholly unworthy of the agonies of the past; a nation of wise and affectionate parents, public-spirited citizens, unselfish neighbours, and honourable craftsmen, where life is esteemed as the only true wealth, and freedom and self-direction are the possessions of all.

¹ Psalm 154.

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Such a unity might not be recognised as religious. If it could come about, it would be seen to deserve the name of spiritual; and a Hebrew prophet, could he behold it, would be ready to say, "Here is a nation that serves Jahve with one heart and with one mind." Even Ezekiel, penetrated by a scrupulous regard for ritual which no other prophet shared, knew that his ideal could not be reached till dishonesty and greed and self-indulgence were loathed, and justice and mercy had become the objects of a passionate desire. Such was, to him, the real foundation of the unity between church and state. The only state which can hope to weather the storms which in these post-war days are already covering the sky is the state whose citizens are united in these spiritual aims.

(Even with the desire for justice and mercy, to carry them out in our complicated society is very difficult. And this difficulty is constantly at work to weaken the desires themselves. But the main thing is to cherish the desire and to feel uncomfortable while it is not being carried out. That is where we fail to-day, as society failed in Jerusalem in the seventh century before Christ.) It is a commonplace of experience that when two opponents really desire to find a way to agreement, it can always be found. (Mankind has never been deficient in intellectual resources to secure peace. When the desire is completely formed, unity is only a matter of time. A properly constituted state does not rest on the support of an unquestioned ecclesiastical institution or on an ingenious system of industrial or international arbitration. It rests on a common reverence, devotion and resolve. Its citizens are not all members of an established church; they

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must all be members of a spiritual community with a spiritual ideal. The difference that separates us from Ezekiel is only one of degree.

But there was another difference in our mind. Modern states are, or are striving to become, democratic, self-governing. Ezekiel knew nothing of self-government. No one did who spoke any of the languages of which he had ever heard. To him, as to the wisest thinkers of his race, the people were best compared to a flock of sheep. It had once been so even in Greece. At the time when David was taken from the sheep-fold to be anointed as king over Israel, the Greek rulers were honourably called "shepherds of the people." Pericles would have repudiated the title. So would Ezekiel's own contemporary, Solon. A great deal can be done with a flock of sheep, even in an Eastern country, where there are no hedges and the sheep wander over the hill-sides or the slopes of the "desert," the open land beyond the margin of cultivation. There is one thing which cannot be done with them. They cannot be left to look after themselves. Education in self-government and the extension of the franchise would have been meaningless terms to a Hebrew. The only question for a patriot was "What sort of a shepherd is to be over the flock; a careless hired man who lets the sheep stray and runs off if he sees a wolf coming; a short-sighted penny-wise and pound-foolish owner, who thinks of nothing but the immediate profit he can make out of the animals; or the genuine shepherd who loves the sheep as if they were his children, and is eager to keep each one of them in health and condition, to present them to their owner and master at the appointed time?"

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In Western countries we say the "sheep" can be trusted to take this matter into their own hands. Modern states have the rulers, as they have the schools and the children, that they deserve. But the metaphor of the flock is not wholly out of date. Could Ezekiel have watched the condition of Central and Eastern Europe at the end of the war, he would have said something like this, "Are not these people as sheep? Their old shepherds have been driven from their midst, and they are gathered now under one new shepherd, now under another. They run hither and thither, and the most part know not whose voice they hear." Writing not many years after the end of the Greek "world-war," Plato came to exactly the same conclusion as Ezekiel; the greatest need of a state is to find rulers who will not rule for what they can secure for themselves (we might add, and for their friends), but for the sake of those whom they rule. Plato, though a Greek, was no democrat, as he understood the term; but it is the great and not the little men who, when they have beheld the multitude, have "had compassion on them, because they are as sheep not having a shepherd." It is true that "my sheep, the sheep of my pasture, are men,"¹ and men can do what sheep cannot do; but no amount of voting once every five years, or five times every single year, will produce the right rulers, unless there is in the state a tradition of the high principle, the unselfish watchfulness, the sense of responsibility to a higher power, on which all good government depends.

1 It thus appears that beneath the important differences which meet us when we leap from one

¹ Ezekiel 34³¹.

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continent to another over twenty-five centuries, our author has come at certain axioms which hold good of all social life, ours not less than his. In so far as he helps us to fix our minds on them, he performs for us the office which Aristotle attributed to the poets ; he leads us from the contemporary and the particular to the universal. We might go on to mention others ; to refer once more to the fact that the institutions of his society were quite different from ours, to point out that in the society for which he was legislating capital (in our sense) was as unknown as cosmopolitan finance ; that factories had never been heard of, and interest was indistinguishable from usury. We might also remark that after describing the downfall of most of the nations known to him and deciding to say nothing as to the destiny of Babylon, he gives himself no further trouble over international relations. Let us admit all this. These familiar elements in our life were as unknown in the old Greek world. Yet we still read Herodotus and Euripides with some attention and profit. And we may, therefore, come to our final question, without the fear that we may be wasting our time.

We have spoken of the corner-stone of Ezekiel's building, the spiritual process of which the legislation of the last chapters of the book was but the sequel. It consists of four stages : restoration from exile to the old home in Palestine ; the gift of cleansing and the new spirit ; enjoyment of the old prosperity ; repentance and self-loathing.¹ These have been already considered in detail in chapter xi., and it is clear that they all depend on supernatural agency. Jahve brings about the first three directly.

¹ Ezekiel 36²⁴⁻³².

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The fourth follows as a necessary result. Have we any right to count upon them for the problems of reconstruction that face us to-day? We can apply to those problems, as we have seen, some at least of the principles of Ezekiel's legislation.¹ But the nerve of Ezekiel's prophecy is cut if this spiritual process, the most striking portion of all his anticipations, is to lie beyond our hopes.

Now we may assume that the scheme was realised to some partial degree, at the actual return from exile, though no one who is familiar with the sombre years between Zerubbabel and Nehemiah will wish to say more than this. But we are accustomed to regard religious changes as being at home in Palestine. In modern Europe it is otherwise. To talk of repentance and a new heart in Europe as we know it to-day raises a smile. It is true that events rarely exhibit an ordered and distinct scheme. It is the business of the prophet and the historian to superinduce order on the chaos of human acts and experiences. But why should Palestine be more kindly to the activity of the spirit than Serbia or England or the land of the Pilgrim Fathers?

Let us then put the scheme to the test, and apply it to the distressed country of whose fate our study of Judah has already reminded us more than once, namely, Serbia. After the first year of the war, Serbia's misery was as terrible as that of Ezekiel's companions. The survivors of her once proud and victorious army had been driven across her frontiers; her population had been all but destroyed by plague, famine and sword: every inch of her territory was held by unscrupulous and ruthless foes; her children no longer had a country. Behind

¹ See chapters 13, 14, 15.

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all this lay a tangled history of patriotism, ambition and intrigue ; Serbia was indeed more sinned against than sinning, as perhaps was the Kingdom of Judah ; but like Judah she could not refuse the evil instructions pressed on her by the cupidity and violence of her neighbours. Hence the collapse, as sudden and tragic as the collapse of 586 B.C.

So far, the parallel is curiously close. But it is now clear that the collapse which was so magnificently avenged by the advance of 1918 will be followed by restoration. Already there are signs in the utterances of her leaders, of a spirit very different from the spirit of the old bad years of the Obrenovitches. Unless the new accord of the League of Nations turns out to be futile, she will know a prosperity impossible in the days when Austria, Bulgaria and Turkey were throttling her commerce and industry. Is it impossible to expect that as the leading member of the new Jugo-Slav state, she will repudiate and even regard with horror the crimes which, though far less heinous than the crimes committed against her, made her for a time a by-word among the Pharisees of Europe ?

But if we can allow this, we have Ezekiel's scheme in full operation. Emboldened by this experiment, let us try another. It may be said that Serbia happens to have afforded, all through her history, a unique parallel to the chosen people. We will therefore take a country where such parallels have never been suspected, save by the adherents of what is known as the British-Israel theory. In Great Britain we have been saved from the trials of Judah or Serbia, or the miseries of the Central nations at the end of the war. But the suffering has been wide-spread and deep enough to make the

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people of this country resolve that they will not run the risk of enduring it a second time. And behind the war, with all the desolation it has brought, the dislocation of industry, and the grave financial and social problems, whose full effect we have not yet experienced, lie our own failings and sins.

We cannot lay all the responsibility for the war on the rapacity of Austria and the aggressiveness of Prussia. Jealousy and suspicion abroad, competition and self-indulgence and the amassing of wealth at home, "the oppressor's wrong, the proud man's contumely," had produced in us quite as definitely as in any of our neighbours the atmosphere from which sooner or later war was bound to spring forth. Had not we the same trust in "iron tube and reeking shard" which was urging all the powers of Europe to their ruin?

The war has ended. One by one, its accompaniments and consequences are being removed. We are being restored, as from exile, to the normal life across which it broke. A new spirit begins to appear, a spirit, for example, that treats with seriousness the possibility of the disappearance of war from the earth and recognises that in care for the interests of others may lie the truest wisdom for the future. With the burden of armaments removed, and an increasing power and willingness to meet the demand for our manufactures abroad, and fresh possibilities of industrial organisation, it may not be oversanguine to hope that the coming years will see a new prosperity. May it not be permitted to hope also that those years will find us beginning, in Ezekiel's phrase, to "loathe" the short-sighted selfishness of the past, as we have learnt to loathe our slave-

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owning and slave-trading, or the obstinacy which lost us the thirteen colonies of America ?

And so we come upon Ezekiel's scheme once more. We might go on to consider it even in the case of Germany or Russia. But that is needless. Ezekiel's "plan of salvation," if it holds good for one nation or one period, will really hold good for all. It rests upon the cardinal assumption of religion. Grant that, and his plan will be found to work, not for ancient Palestine only, but for modern Europe. Deny it, and no plan can be expected to work. Deny that God exists, or that He is interested in mankind, and history is at once reduced to chaos. As soon as we admit these two fundamental claims of religion, we go step by step along the road with Ezekiel. "Rapine and avarice," as Wordsworth said, "are idolatry"; and they are divisive and self-destructive. No divine arm is needed to hurl their proper punishment upon them. They produce it themselves. But for their victims, if they are to rise again, some deliverance from their sufferings must be secured. For this, as Ezekiel saw, we must look to a divine interposition. This need be no miraculous victory or escape. It may be unrecognisable by all save the enlightened: as unrecognisable as when Cyrus, who had probably never heard of Ezekiel, gave permission to a body of Jewish exiles to return to Palestine, or as when the Messiah was born in a shed outside the village khan. The history of the past war contains more than one incident which, if it had been related by the men who wrote the Old Testament narratives, would have sounded as miraculous as the destruction of Sennacherib's host or the passing of the Red Sea.

Men so delivered, unless they are like the

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returning Bourbons, incapable either of learning or forgetting, will be the possessors of a new mind and heart, a new attitude to the unseen. And as the clouds of their suffering roll away and comfort and well-being return, they will be ready to repudiate and hate the spirit which led them into misery and disaster and to tune their life to the neglected practices of honesty and kindly dealing, purity and humility. Legislation must then be called in to play its part in preserving this attitude. It must "weight the alternative" on the side of good and against evil. It must build on all the existing moral convictions of the people ; it must order life in such a way that the degrading and dangerous practices of the past are felt and seen to be " not worth while."

Ezekiel has in fact sketched out no arbitrary diagram or systematisation of history. He offers us a genuine philosophy of reconstruction. We need not claim that his four stages will always, or indeed, ever, be distinct and separable. They were not in the case of the returning Jews. Life is continuous. But he has set before us the elements which must be present if reconstruction is to be accomplished. His prophecy of restoration is far more than a prediction. It is a type of the changes which must take place unless, when one world has died, the other is to remain powerless to be born. He is not afraid of tracing the whole process to its origin in the mercy and grace of God. No theist can find fault with him. Indeed, he is throwing out a challenge to every theist's faith, a challenge that we should do well in these days to be more ready to take up. To believe in a brighter future is to bring it all the nearer. But God is presented as a co-worker with men. He always is this. Ezekiel knows what

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only God can do, and what God Himself cannot do unless with the co-operation of man. Human progress is made up of such inter-action between the mind and hopes of men and the spirit and loving-kindness of God.

If this claim for Ezekiel is justified, our usual estimate of his place among the prophets must be revised. He is not the ritualist who imports into prophecy a dangerous element which his predecessors had wisely cast aside. He was as well aware as they that "Volkssitte" must be "Volkssittlichkeit." They flung ritual out of the place where it had no business to be as the greatest of them all flung the traffickers out of the Temple. When that place had been filled by the spiritual and ethical enthusiasms to which it belonged, and which Ezekiel struggled to secure as devotedly as his comrades, he for his part brought back ritual to its own rightful place. By doing so, he accomplished the stability and continuity of the spiritual change which he had analysed more deeply than any of his predecessors.

Nor is he the craftsman who gives his attention to details where the other prophets have proclaimed the great principles of conduct and life. He proclaimed these principles with an indignant ardour as consuming as theirs. But he went further. In the midst of a world-wide tempest, when the bark of his little state was swept into the waters that were overwhelming the galleys of the proudest nations of the age, he laid down the rules by which the port could be regained and the ship re-fitted for a new and prosperous voyage. In such a case the philosopher would rely on setting free some recuperative power in human society; the moralist would

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reiterate the laws of justice and truth; the prophet would bid men wait until the arm of the Lord was revealed, to effect a deliverance beyond all human agency; while the priest might urge them to a renewed zeal for public worship. It was the unique achievement of Ezekiel to see that each of these was necessary, but that none of them could dispense with the rest. He goes beyond philosophers and moralists, prophets and priests alike; for he shows the place of each in relation to the others. He was thinking of Judah and her recovery; but his thoughts were so massive and penetrating that he has actually described the essentials of all recovery. He is not the prophet or the philosopher of social reconstruction, but the architect.

The exile produced two more great and inspired works. On the eve of deliverance, a voice crying in the wilderness proclaimed the good tidings in tones thrilling with emotion. Not a word as to the sins which had plunged Judah into exile, save that they were all blotted out like a thick cloud; instead, a commanding challenge to her faith in Jahve's approaching salvation, a glowing anticipation of the triumphant return, and the magnificent suggestion that her restoration would crown her with the glory of revealing Jahve to the nations of the world.

About the same time, or perhaps somewhat earlier, four poems had been written, describing a mysterious figure entitled simply "the servant of Jahve."¹ A task of ever-increasing difficulty and peril is entrusted to him. It culminates in his death, a death which followed on a life of such affliction and repulsiveness that it aroused merely contempt and

¹ Isaiah 42¹⁻⁹, 49¹⁻¹³, 50⁴⁻¹¹, 52¹³-53¹².

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loathing in the onlookers. But when the end came, its real nature was understood ; it was the sins of Israel, of the nation, that the sufferer had been bearing ; his death was their redemption.

Both these masterpieces reached heights to which Ezekiel could not attain. His was not the lyrical rapture of the herald of the dawn. Nor could he conceive of Jahve crying out like a woman in travail, in His eagerness to sweep away the hills and valleys that impeded His people's return. He could not mount up with wings ; but he could walk and not faint. He did not describe in burning words the journey home ; his was the humbler but the no less important task, to underscore the lessons of the past and to prepare for the complex and arduous duties of the ideal future.

Again, his stern sense of individualism would never have allowed him to divine the master-conception of vicariousness. That one man could bear the sins of another and by so bearing them, even up to the point of death, could save others from their guilt and power, he never guessed. In this sense, Ezekiel is no more "evangelical" than Isaiah or Amos. He never saw the glory of God in the face of Jesus. Outside the walls of his exalted city, he saw the Temple ; he never saw Calvary. And he never dwelt upon the possibility that through the restored Israel the world might learn the laws and experience the salvation of Jahve. It was enough for him that the nations should know that Jahve, so far from being dishonoured by the exile of His people, had Himself accomplished their restoration.¹

But the "servant songs" are no theodicy ; they reveal a secret hidden from Ezekiel, but it is a secret

¹ Ezekiel 3635,36.

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which after all fits into his great scheme of repentance and restoration.] They tell us, as no other passage in the whole of literature has ever told us, that human repentance springs not only from divine goodness, but from the suffering and agony of one found in fashion as a man. That is not to antiquate Ezekiel's doctrine, but to crown it.

Only after such a survey as we have now concluded can we appreciate Ezekiel's real service to the cause of religion. Others might express a warmer emotion or a deeper sympathy. They might reproach sin with more impassioned pleadings, or paint in more glowing and pathetic colours the gracious and pitying condescension of Jahve. Ezekiel had none of the plastic skill of the Greek. It was his work, with a kind of Roman thoroughness and Stoic self-restraint, to elaborate the plan of salvation. In so doing, he had to lay bare the obscure processes of the human heart and penetrate the mysteries of the deliberate counsels of God. Like another great teacher in whom philosophic calm and poetic rapture often dwelt side by side, he had to rise above the "*flammantia moenia mundi*."

But, in dealing with minds of the first rank, all parallels, classical or modern, must fall short. Equally unsatisfying are the comparisons by which we endeavour to exalt one child of Prometheus, the giver of the heavenly fire, above another. To "the heights and pinnacles of human mind," as to the humblest of their fellow workers, we can only do justice when we can sum up, and lay on our own hearts, the message to whose expression they consecrated their strength.

Ezekiel's message, clear-cut and methodical, is for all time. God's rule is absolute; God's will is

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supreme ; God's restoring mercy is certain. Repentance and humiliation are indispensable conditions of restoration ; when these are secured human obstacles are doomed to disappear. The great corrupting agencies of greed and self-indulgence will be kept out of the restored society by ordered obedience to God's law, which is at once necessary and possible. When it is attained, the presence of God is revealed. "The tabernacle of God is with men, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them and shall be their God."¹ It is for us to take the message to heart, and with reverent hope to perform our part in its fulfilment. We cannot fear lest God should not do His.

¹ Rev. 213.

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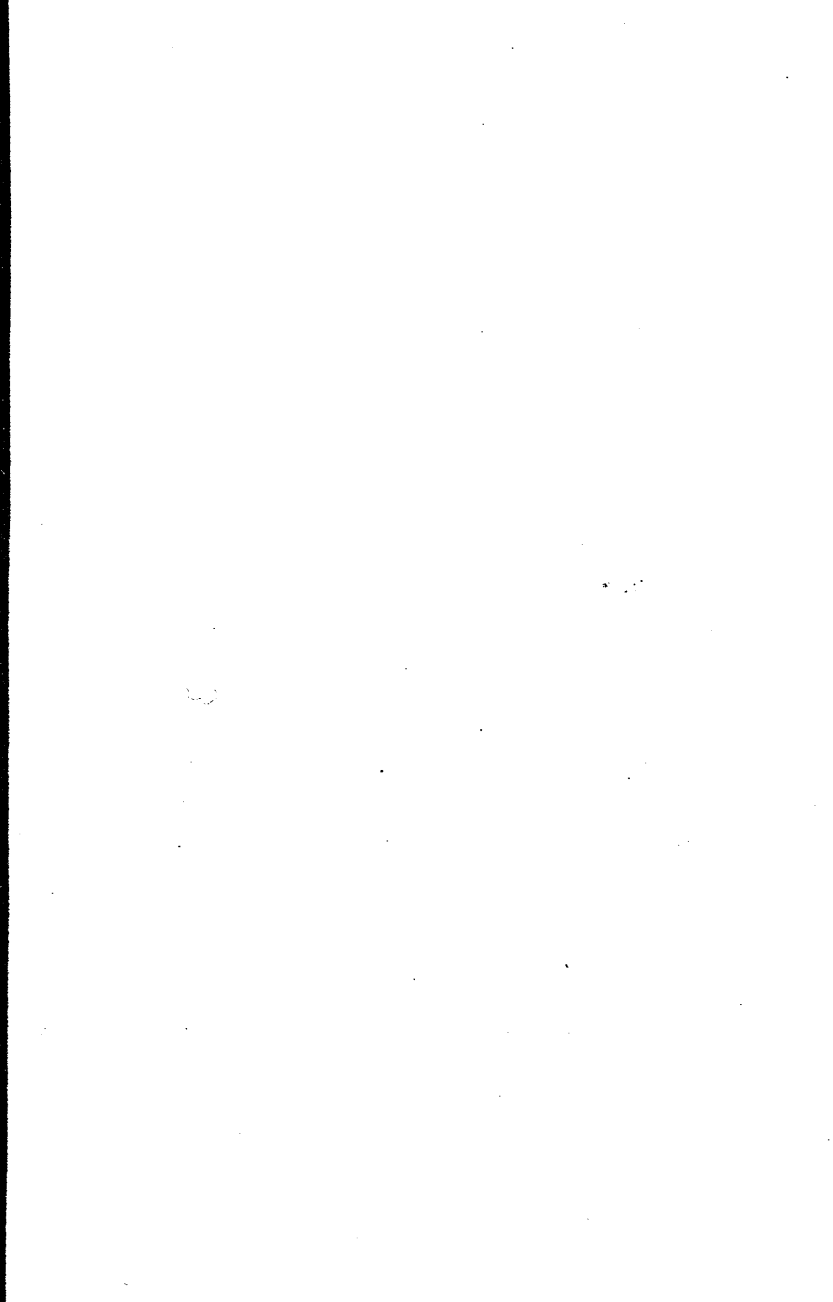
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